ARGOSY

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CHRISTMAS
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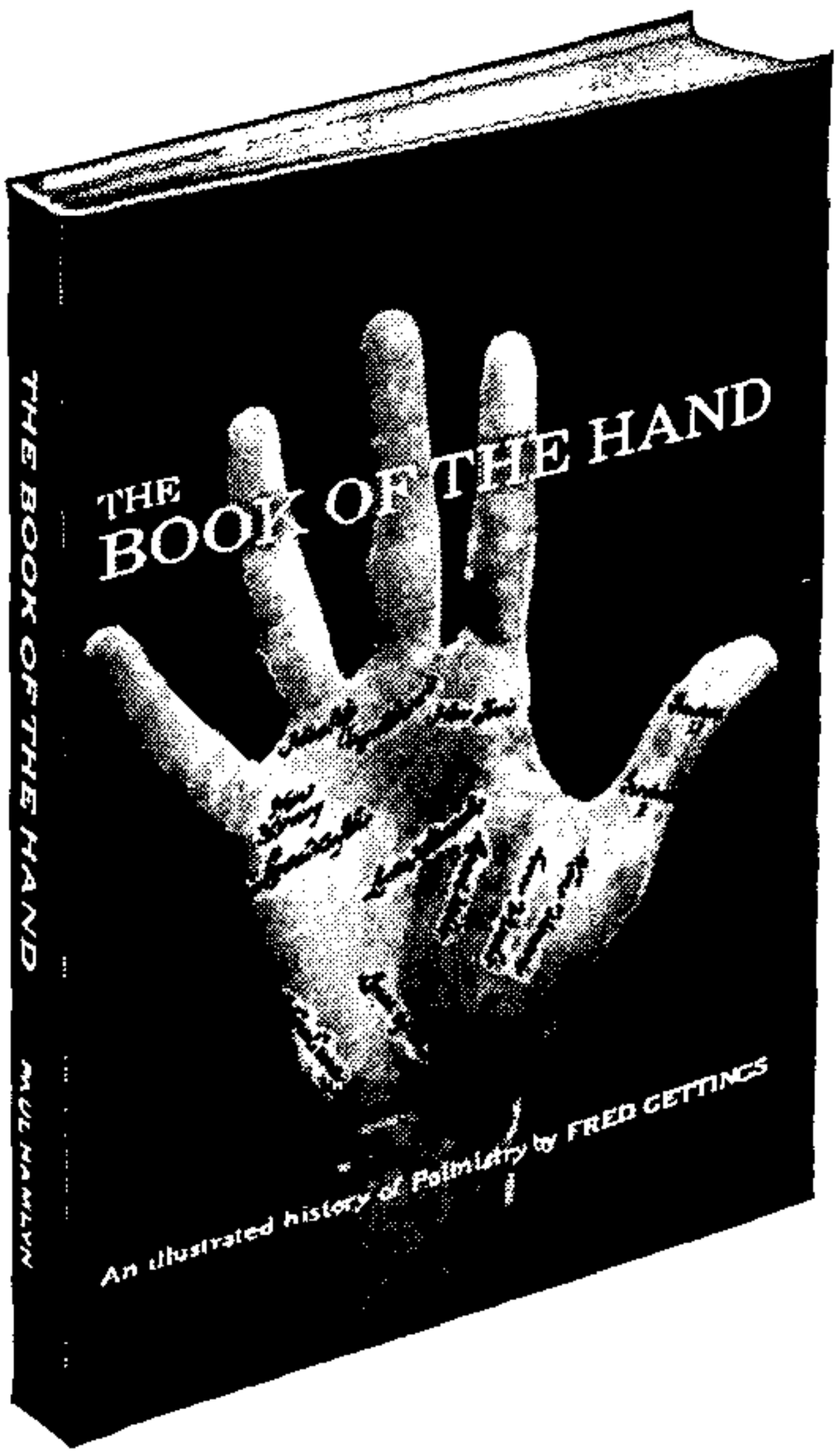

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A Fleetway magazine

A

PAUL GALLICO

WITH a whoosh of her retro-rockets, the multi-lateral-crewed, International Trans-Space Earth Capsule, *Starflight,* Captain Jack Armstrong, USA, landed on the wide plain of the planet Beta.

Hardly had the supports of the capsule touched down, when Captain Armstrong and his crew appeared to greet the large crowd of inhabitants of Beta and their leaders.

For it was the morning of December 25th, Christmas Day, and the astronauts were all filled with Christmas nostalgia as they thought of the loved ones at home—two travel years away —who would be celebrating in the usual fashion.

Before descending, Captain Armstrong waved his hand and shouted, " Merry Christmas, everyone!" but elicited no reply. He said, " I guess they don't know what Christmas is here, fellers, but they look friendly, so let's go!"

He came down the steps followed by Engineer Sergeivitch, Astrologer Kraus, Navigator Van Dongen, Biologist Lebrun, Communications chief Cartwright-Smith, Rocket expert Moretti, Meteorologist Stein, Geologist Svendstrom and, of course, the Professor. Only one member of the party was not present, Harrison, who had remained behind in the capsule to prepare himself for the important role he was to play.

The inhabitants were patting their hands together and making curious bleating sounds which, apparently, was their

An internationally famous writer tells a story of Christmas that is stranger than fiction, but more modern than tomorrow

language. Now one of them stepped forward, bowed respectfully and said in perfect English, "Welcome to Beta planet. I am the Official Interpreter. We are happy to see you. However, I didn't quite understand the nature of the cry you emitted as you emerged from the doorway; the one that sounded like 'Merry Christmas, everyone!'"

"It's Christmas Day," Captain Armstrong said, "and we are going to have a celebration. The Professor here, hit it right on the nose in his calculations. He said we would be landing on December 25th."

The Professor, who was a small, thin man with a bald, bulging dome, acknowledged the Captain's compliment.

After having turned this statement into bleeps and bleats, the Interpreter said, "Our leader will be pleased to have you conduct your celebration, provided it doesn't create too much of a disturbance. But he would like to know more about it. What exactly is it you are about to commemorate?"

"Christmas," repeated Captain Armstrong, "the anniversary of the birth of Our Lord; the day He was born."

The Interpreter nodded courteously and said, "Oh, yes, we're familiar with the story of your Man-God. There was a delegation here a little while ago who told us about Him. But they didn't tell us the day He was born, only the day He died."

The Professor snorted, "That doesn't surprise me! They

didn't tell you the day He was born because they couldn't."

The square, handsome jaw of Captain Armstrong set itself. "Aw, now Professor, cut that out! What do you mean? Everyone knows it was December 25th of the year nothing; you know, between BC and AD, and the star over Bethlehem and the Three Wise Men . . ."

"My dear Captain," the Professor retorted, "nobody knows anything of the kind. No-one knows anything definite of the origin of that date, or who first celebrated it, or when, or where, or how. As a matter of fact, at the time of Christ, and for several centuries afterwards, the celebration of birthdays was considered heathen by His followers and the birthday of Our Lord Himself was not excepted."

Captain Armstrong looked as though someone had snatched his lollipop away from him. He would much have preferred to have left the Professor at home, but the law said that every inter-planetary expedition must be accompanied by one. The others of the crew stood around, shuffling their feet uneasily.

The Professor removed and polished his spectacles for a moment and then, replacing them, said, "There, there, Captain, you needn't look so glum. December 25th is the accepted date and it will do as well as any other. Better, in fact, than most, because from the very first appearance of man on Earth, to the remote times of Ancient Egyptian civilisation, and the days of the Gauls, the Teutons, the Celts, Ancient Rome and Greece, the winter solstice has always been a period of rejoicing and feasting. Christmas is really a pagan festival, you know."

The Interpreter produced a large notebook which he thumbed before he said, "The other delegation didn't mention that."

Lighting his pipe to get into a more comfortable attitude for lecturing, the Professor said, "It was pretty confusing and they don't like to let on, you know; they were stuck with Druid gods, Celtic, Teuton, Scandinavian, Greek and Roman, Mithraic and a lot of nastier ones from the Assyrians and the Chaldaeans. The Christians had to take them over lock, stock and barrel. Of course, they *did* change them around somewhat. Christmas was always a problem for, as St. Clement said in the Fourth Century, the matter was very uncertain. The first record we have is from St. John Chrysostom who, writing in the year 386, tells that Julius, Pope of Rome, from 337 to 352, ordered St. Cyril to look into the matter and make a strict inquiry as to the exact date of the Birth.

"Cyril, I'm afraid, ran into a lot of trouble with opinions ranging from January 6th through to April 20th, May 20th, March 29th and September 29th, but most of the Western Churches settled on December 25th. Cyril plumped for the majority. Pope Julius accepted his report and in the middle of the Fourth Century, established the festival at Rome on December 25th."

Captain Armstrong at last managed to slip a word in edgewise and said, plaintively, "Okay, Professor, but that's what I said in the first place, wasn't it—December 25th? Can we get on with it now?"

Engineer Sergeivitch was looking gloomy. "You fellows can," he said, "but I can't. In Russia the date for the Orthodox Church is January 15th."

The Interpreter pricked up his ears and said, "Russia? We had a delegation here from Russia only a short while ago. They said they didn't believe in the Man-God at all."

Sergeivitch sniffed. "They were Red Russians. I'm a White Russian."

The Interpreter said, "I see," but didn't look as though he did. "They want to know how it is you celebrate this event."

A great light illuminated the handsome features of Captain Armstrong as he cried, "Shops and shopping! Do you have any department stores here? I don't suppose you have, but it doesn't matter—we've already done ours. We've got the greatest department stores in the world and boy, do they go to town!" His snapping eyes sparkled as though the mere mention of department stores had transported him back nostalgically to faraway Earth.

"They have themselves a real ball and millions of dollars are involved. What am I saying! I guess it must be billions, by the time you count in everything like advertising and window-dressing and sponsoring shows on television. Why, it's the greatest sight in the world to walk down Fifth Avenue just before Christmas. They start right in after Thanksgiving and the old orange-coloured crêpe paper, turkeys, pumpkins and ears of corn get chucked out, and the red and green ribbons, paper bells and tinsel go into the windows, and a sort of toyland for kids, and electric trains running around and from then on they're at you and never let up. You see, they've got more goddam junk to get rid of, it's their big season for a killing, and so if you've got any Christmas spirit you get in there and buy. It's buy, buy, buy whether you want to or not."

The Interpreter had been taking notes furiously. He said, "I see, and this is also in honour of the Man-God, all of this buying and selling?"

Captain Armstrong looked taken aback for a moment. "Well, I wouldn't say that exactly," he replied. "But it's a great thing for the country, isn't it? That's how you keep the economy going. You've got to have prosperity."

The Interpreter looked bewildered and consulted his note-book, shaking his head. "The delegation that wore their collars around backwards said that the Man-God didn't approve of the venders of articles and the money-changers, and whipped them from the forecourt of the Temple."

"Oh, my goodness!" said Captain Armstrong, with a momentary vision of a band of monks invading Saks Fifth Avenue, Gimbels or Macy's armed with horse whips, chastising customers and sales personnel into the streets; "I don't think that could happen in our country."

Astrologer Kraus suddenly expostulated, "Hell, that's not Christmas! The most important thing about Christmas is the tree."

"A tree?" said the Interpreter, "I don't think I understand. Your Captain just said . . ."

"A Christmas tree," Kraus said. "We've brought a small one with us. We decorate it with tinsel and coloured glass balls, icicles and glass birds, cornucopias and peppermint canes, baskets of sweets and angel's hair, and a star at the top of it."

The Interpreter looked baffled. "Indeed," he said, "and why do you do that?"

No-one seemed to know the answer to this, so Kraus continued; "And lights; dozens and dozens of lights. There used to be candles, but now, of course, they are electric. In the old days a lot of houses used to burn down every year from Christmas-tree fires."

The Interpreter made a note of this and asked, "This was part of the ceremony, this burning of the houses?"

"No, no!"

Meteorologist Stein spoke up here. "The lights on the trees are probably a reflection of the Jewish feast of Hanukkah, which occurs around this time. All Israel must have been lit up with these lights the night Jesus was born. We still use candles on our Christmas tree."

The Interpreter looked genuinely confused. "But I thought —we were told I mean—that your people didn't believe in the Man-God, or Christmas."

"We don't," Stein admitted, "but the kids like it and so you gotta have it. And, anyway, my wife would raise hell if I didn't make with the mink, or something for Christmas."

Kraus said, somewhat heavily, "The Christmas tree is a German invention of the last hundred and fifty years and was spread all over the world by German immigrants."

Captain Armstrong cried, "What? I thought we'd started them—anyway, those pink and purple ones."

Cartwright-Smith said stiffly, "We took them over when Queen Victoria's husband imported the first Christmas tree into Great Britain from Germany; Albert, you know."

"Albert?"

The Professor filled in, "Francis Charles Augustus Albert Emmanuel, of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, the second son of Ernest, Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, by Princess Louise of Saxe-Gotha-Altenburg. Victoria and Albert were married on February 10th, 1840."

"Thank you very much," said the Interpreter, feebly.

Geologist Svendstrom put in his oar. "How do you get that way, Kraus? That's a lot of bunk, that hundred and fifty years stuff. We figure it to have a connection with the great tree Yggdrasil of Norse mythology."

"Ah," the Professor murmured, half to himself, "the world tree whose roots and branches bind together heaven and hell. On the top of Yggdrasil sits an eagle with the falcon Vedfolnir perched on his head. The squirrel Ratatosk scurries between the eagle and the serpent Nidhögg, gnawing at the roots of the tree and tries to stir up discord between them."

The Interpreter said, "I'm afraid I don't get that."

"Never mind," Rocket expert Moretti put in, "that's all a lot of rubbish anyway. The Christmas tree is a revival of the pine trees in the good old, Roman Saturnalia which were decorated with images of Bacchus."

"For that matter," said the Professor, "if you're going to go that far back, the Ancient Egyptians in the time of the winter solstice used to decorate their houses with branches of the date palm."

Captain Armstrong said somewhat impatiently, "Look here, fellers, it's no good wasting time arguing. What these good people here want to learn about is Christmas and what it's like; you know, with Santa Claus and everything."

The Interpreter looked up from his notebook. "Santa Claus?" he queried. "I don't believe..."

"Tell 'em," said Stein.

Captain Armstrong suddenly looked embarrassed. "Well, he's this character that the kids look up to. He's got a great, big, fat stomach, a red nose and a long white beard and he dresses up in a sort of a red suit with white trimming on it, and wears black boots and a long red cap with a tassel on the end. He—well, he drives through the sky in a sleigh full of toys, drawn by eight reindeer and he, er—comes down the chimney and leaves presents in the stockings of the kids." He stopped to wipe the perspiration from his brow, aware that the Interpreter was looking at him very strangely.

"You have no doors on your houses?" the Interpreter asked.

The Captain perspired still more profusely. "Sure, we've got doors. It's just that he likes coming down the chimney. That's how it is."

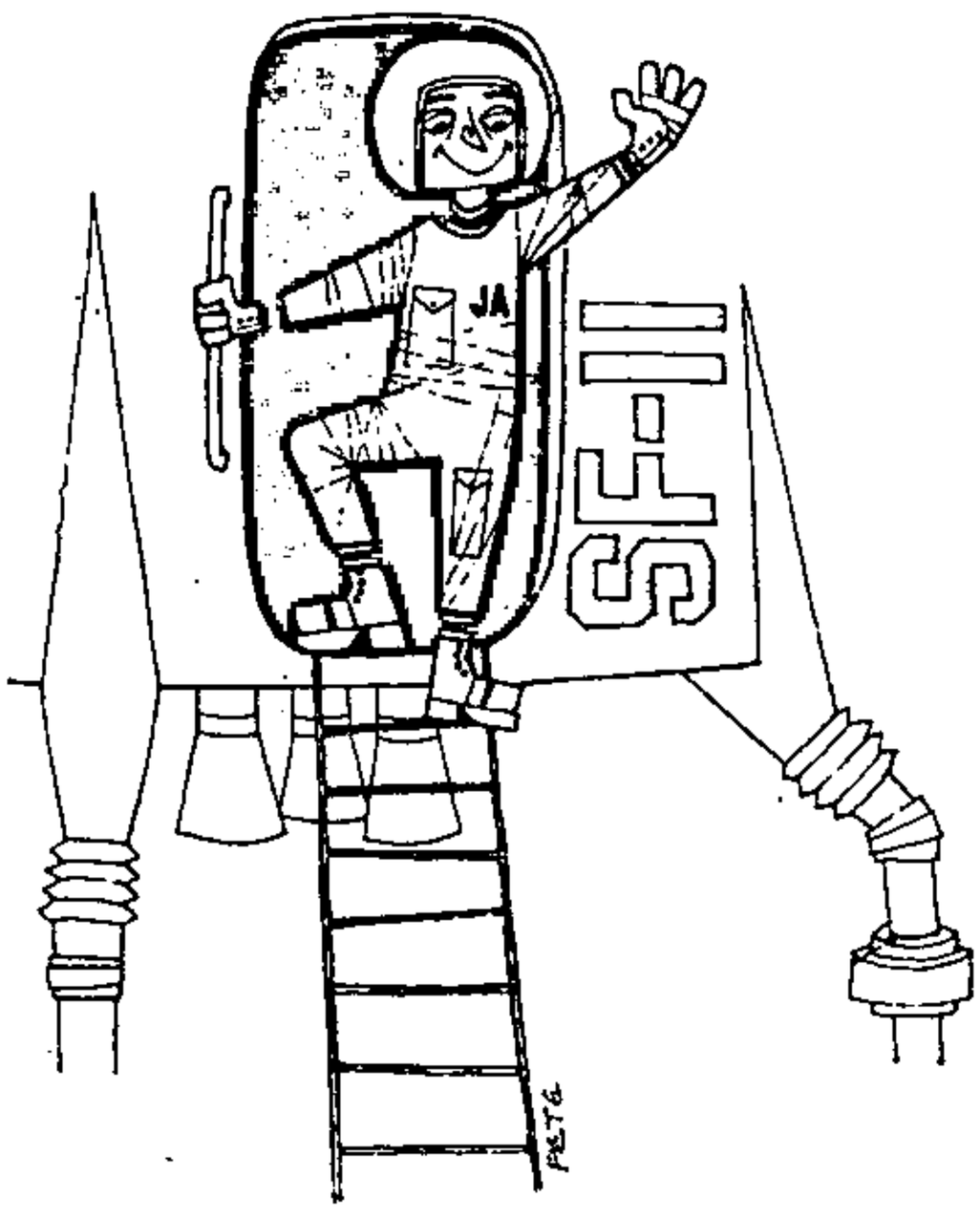
"And these stockings?"

Cartwright-Smith said, "In England they often hang up pillowcases. Hold more, you know."

The Interpreter was shaking his head over his notes; "Round, fat stomach—red nose, you say—flies through the sky—comes down the chimney—you wish me to tell them all this?"

The Captain threw an anguished look at the Professor and said, "For God's sake, Prof, can't you help me out?"

"Certainly," agreed the Professor, "glad to oblige." He tamped down the dottle in his pipe, relit it and, pointing the stem at the Interpreter said, "Santa Claus; corruption from the Dutch form, *Sint Klaas*—further corruption, of course, of St. Nicholas, Bishop of Myra in Lycia, in the Fourth Century, patron saint of Russia and especially of serfs and serfdom, because he did protect the weak against the strong. Incidentally, he was the patron saint of pawnbrokers, too. The three gold balls of the Pawnbrokers' Guild represent the three bags of gold that he gave to the daughters of a poor man, secretly at night, to save them from having to earn their dowers in—well, in a disreputable way.



"Another story relates that he once resuscitated three schoolboys, whom a wicked innkeeper had murdered, cut up and pickled in a salting-tub to serve for bacon. He died on December 6th in the year 326, and is buried at Bari in Apulia."

The Interpreter was looking fascinated. "You say the boys were cut up and pickled in a salting-tub to serve for bacon?" The translation seemed to give great pleasure and excitement to the members of the crowd.

"Look here, old man," Cartwright-Smith said, "surely that's not Father Christmas you're talking about?"

"You mean *der Weihnachtsmann,*" put in Kraus.

"*Kris Kringle,*" Svendstrom corrected him.

"Sanny Claus, where I come from," said Stein.

"Nonsense," Moretti said quietly, "I'm afraid you fellows have got it all wrong. We call her *la Befana, la Strega* or *la Veccia* in Italy, and *she* brings presents to little children on Twelfth Night."

"*La Befana*?" the Interpreter cried. "But that would be a woman, wouldn't it? You said *he* had a round, fat stomach and red nose and..."

"Oh, lord!" groaned Captain Armstrong. "For God's sake, Professor, tell Moretti he's all wet."

The Professor replied, "But he isn't. There's a nice little legend they tell about St. Befana. When the Three Kings passed on their way to worship the Christ Child, they invited an old woman by that name to accompany them, but she said she was too busy cleaning her house. Later, when she tried to follow them she got lost and never did see the Holy Child. So every year she comes looking for Him, leaving presents of candy and sweetmeats in the stockings of good children, stones and pieces of coal for the naughty ones."

"Huh!" Kraus snorted. "That's *Frau Berchta* you're talking about."

The Professor nodded, "Quite right. She's also known as *Berkta, Brechta, Brecht, Percht* or *Perchta* in Germany. Interesting character, that. On Twelfth Night everyone must eat pancakes, herrings, or dumplings for supper and leave the remains on the table for *Berchta* or she will cut open their stomachs, remove the food and then sew them up again, using a ploughshare threaded with chains. The ploughshare, of course, has something to do with fertility. In Northern Germany she's called *Frau Holde.*"

"In Russia," said Sergeivitch, "she's known as *Babushka.*"

"In Scandinavia," put in Svendstrom, "we call her *Kristine.*"

"In France, of course," said Lebrun, "the correct name is *Bonhomme Noël.*"

"It's the Christmas crackers I miss, when I'm away, and pulling them with the kids," Cartwright-Smith murmured reflectively.

"Crackers . . . crackers . . ." the Interpreter was frowning deeply as he tried to find a proper translation for the word. "Ah, biscuits, of course, a kind of cake."

"No, no! Party crackers, the kind you pull at both ends and they explode in the middle with a bang. You see it's a sort of a cylinder of red paper with a coloured picture stuck to it, you know, something Christmassy. Well, there's a little thing sticking out from each end and two people take hold of this thing and pull and it goes 'snap.' Then you open the red paper in the middle and take out whatever is in it, such as a paper hat, or aprons, or bonnets, or maybe a whistle and there's usually some kind of a motto."

"Motto?"

"Well, you know, something like: 'Roses are red, violets are blue, sugar is sweet and so are you.'"

"Oh, I see," said the Interpreter, "a hymn. I'll translate it," and he did so. The Betans seemed to take to it for they swayed and clapped their hands.

"They wish to know," the Interpreter said, "whether this explosion of which you speak is all a part of the religious ceremony in honour of the Man-God."

"I wouldn't know about that," replied Cartwright-Smith, "but the children seem to enjoy it, like kissing under the mistletoe."

The Interpreter was fast at picking up, "Mistletoe—kissing—?"

"Oh, lord," groaned Captain Armstrong, but it was too late.

"You hang up a sprig of mistletoe," Cartwright-Smith explained, "and if a girl stands under it, a boy can go over and give her a kiss."

Almost automatically the Interpreter looked towards the Professor in the hopes of a fuller explanation, and was not disappointed. He obliged at once: "Species of *viscum* of the natural order of *Loranthaceae* which grows as a parasite on hawthorn, pear and apple trees. In Scandinavian mythology the mistletoe figures as the material of the arrow

with which Balder, the sun god, was slain, but we won't go into that. The Druids made a great ceremony out of gathering the mistletoe, sacrificing a white bull and sometimes humans as well. But, of course, the modern usage at Christian festivities derives from the heathen Saturnalia where, I gather, what went on under the mistletoe was pretty rough. We've toned it down to kissing."

"What about bringing in the yule log," Svendstrom asked, "and passing round the wassail bowl?"

The Interpreter interrupted, "How do you spell that?"

The Professor replied, "You can take your choice of j-u-l or y-u-l-e. This was the name given by the Ancient Goths and Saxons to the festival of the winter solstice, when they used to kindle huge bonfires in honour of their god, Thor. Similar bonfires were lit in Europe at the summer solstice in honour of the birthday of St. John the Baptist, set by the Church for June 24th. The fires were really a form of symbolic sun worship, and were called Beltane fires to placate the god Bel, originally the ancient Baal of the scriptures, and were connected by the Druids with May Day festivities. The maypole itself, of course, is a phallic emblem and . . ."

Captain Armstrong, looking deeply shocked, interrupted, "Hey, hey, Professor, take it easy there! Let's get back on the subject. We have our Christmas dinner; roast turkey, of course. Everybody eats roast turkey for Christmas dinner."

The Interpreter consulted his notebook and then protested, "But I thought this was the bird that you ate in celebration of quite another feast called Thanksgiving?"

"I can't help that," Captain Armstrong said. "We eat it at Christmas too. Everybody all over the world eats turkey at Christmas."

"We don't," said Sergeivitch. "We eat carp or sturgeon."

"Roast goose," said Kraus.

"Nothing of the kind," Biologist Lebrun contradicted. "In France we eat oysters, also *écrevisses* at the *Grande Fête de Réveillon.* Last year over a million oysters and a hundred and fifty thousand crayfish were sold at *Les Halles* in Paris."

Svendstrom said, "Well, we eat roast pig with an apple in its mouth."

"Roast ham," added the Professor, "roast oxen, black jacks, Cheshire cheese, boar's head, peacocks, lampreys, brawn and mustard, sheep's heads, salmon, oat cakes, kid—anything man can swallow is devoured at Christmas time."

The Interpreter was looking more and more distraught.

"Don't you people on Earth agree on anything?" he asked.

"Of course we do," replied Cartwright-Smith, "Christmas pud."

"Christmas what?"

"Christmas plum pudding. Everybody eats *that* at the end of their Christmas dinner." He threw his head back, his eyes half closed and an expression reminiscent and sentimental came over his features.

"I remember a recipe of my grandmother's," he said. "She put in suet, flour, eggs, raisins, butter, milk, chopped nuts, currants, chopped orange, grapefruit and lemon peel, grated carrots, apple and nutmeg, cinnamon, sugar, bread-crumbs, salt and all-spice, brandy, white wine, black treacle and sherry and stout."

The Interpreter had been writing furiously on his pad again. He looked up and asked, "You didn't make a mention of any plums?"

"Of course not!"

"Then why do you call it plum pudding?"

Cartwright-Smith looked stumped for a moment and said, "Well, we just do."

"I see, and after you put all those things in what happens?"

"It's stirred and stirred and stirred, cooked for five or six hours and then left for a year."

"For how long?"

"It's supposed to be better if you keep it for a year."

"And then what do you do?"

"Well, then you heat it up and put in little charms of silver, in the form of rabbits and turtles, horseshoes, rings, moneybags, wishbones, four-leafed clovers, and sometimes brand new sixpences or silver threepenny bits."

"And then?"

"Then you set fire to it and eat it."

The Interpreter translated to cries of astonishment and disbelief and said, "You don't mean you actually eat this—mess?"

"Yes."

"They want to know if you don't get awfully ill afterwards?"

"Yes. Very."

"And the Man-God likes this?"

Lebrun said, "We'd better change the subject."

But now that Christmas had been thoroughly expounded they became silent. All of them felt a sadness clutch at their

throats, the imminent presence of tears that had to be held back and they did not know why. Whatever it was, whatever had been their customs, Christmas had all seemed so secure, warm, and a part of them, until they had had to try to explain it in terms, not of what they thought or experienced, but of what they did. Then everything seemed to fall away into ashes. Nobody had thought to mention what they felt at this time.

A voice from inside the capsule was heard: "Here I come, fellows! Ho, ho, ho! Merry Christmas!"

They all knew with a kind of helpless horror that in the next moment Harrison was going to turn up, ridiculously clad in the red and white Santa suit they had brought along, with a pillow stuffed under his tunic, a false white beard, his nose reddened with lipstick, to stand before the assembled natives.

This would be the most embarrassing moment of all.

And now, even as they expected, Harrison appeared at the door of the capsule and descended the steps, shaking the pillow with which he was stuffed and shouting, "Ho, ho, ho! Merry Christmas all!" while the natives turned their heads and looked at one another in astonishment.

Yet, when he reached the bottom of the steps and sat down, a strange thing happened. One of the children in the front row stretched out four of its little arms to the jolly figure with the red nose and twinkling eyes in the red suit, with the shiny boots, and the long, white beard and tasselled cap.

Harrison picked it up and put it on his lap, where it rested two of its three heads on his breast with a sigh of utter contentment.

"And what do you want for Christmas, my little one?" rumbled Harrison-Santa Claus.

From its third head came a reply, "Bleep fleegle gleeble kleep."

"He says," the Interpreter translated, "that he wants a big, red fire-engine."

And thereafter, just as though it were happening all together back on Earth as in the old days, all the embarrassment, doubts and fears of the men vanished. They felt once more warm, happy, safe and secure.

It was Christmas again.

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A Short Story of Love and Marriage

THE house in which Mr. and Mrs. Molvern lived was one of the usual kind, with its red painted door and small garden looking out on a very dreamy park. The bed-room windows which all looked out on the front, had half dirty white curtains in them above which could be seen dark silk sashes of the same dirtiness.

Mr. Molvern was a red-haired quick tempered gentleman, with very small grey eyes and a clever looking pink face. He would always wear brown suits, but as everybody said he looked much better in black. Mrs. Molvern was quite on the contrary. She had indeed a quiet temper, with a pale delicate looking face with large brown eyes that looked at people with great interest, and her fair hair glistened in the sun. She usually wore half dirty white dresses, and in going out she wore a dark blue velvet jacket with black fur and a brown hat with red poppies. She never wore gloves except on Sundays and then she wore yellow cotton ones.

At the present time they had a young gentleman staying with them who lived in the neighbourhood. He was sitting in his room waiting for the town clock to strike four, because when it did he had to go out and meet his truelove, whose name was Edith Plush. His own name was Thomas Henrick but he was known as Burke in that family. At last hearing the hour strike, he snatched up a felt hat, and putting it on his greasy head started off to meet his truelove.

by DAISY ASHFORD

Years ago, an eight-year-old girl dictated this short story to her father. It was then forgotten. Later on she became famous as the authoress of "The Young Visiters"— and that long-forgotten story turned up again in a recently-published collection

When he reached Mionge Lane he met his pretty truelove skipping along most lady-like and primly. She was dressed in a light blue dress with a white sash tied at the side in two knots. Her long fair hair hung down her back tied with a pink ribbon, and her fringe was fluttering in the breeze. Behind her fringe she wore a wreath of green ivy. In one hand she carried a leghorn hat with red and blue ribbon, and in the other a silken bag filled with a threepenny bit and two biscuits, and her age was nineteen.

"Well my pretty bird," she said as she approached Burke, "I hope you will like to *manger* a biscuit with me." (I may add that she was fond of French.)

"Thank you Edith," he said, "I will have one if its a cracknel."

Then Edith burst into a fit of tears and howled out, "Oh, but they are Osbornes."

"Well to dry up those tears, I will eat one," said Burke.

"You dear!" said Edith like sunshine after rain, for the smiles had come on her face, as she opened her silken bag and popped one into his blistered hand. After this Burke and Edith walked along down the lane, which I forgot to say was shaded by trees all along.

"Burke," said Edith after a long pause, "you have talked often enough and said we shall be married one day, but when it is going to come off I am sure I dont know."

"Well my dear Edith you must recollect I am not a good dancer and have no nice suits, and you must recollect my people are not in this neighbourhood and I cant write marriage letters, and to begin with I dont think my people would like me to be married just yet as I am not quite twenty nine."

"Well it is silly of you," said Edith, "after having talked to me so often about it, and bothered to come into my house, and sat on the drawing room sofa to make arrangements, and now you seem not to care for it a bit, just because your people are not in the neighbourhood; and besides I was getting quite excited about it!"

"If you had only a little more reason in you," said Burke, "you might take it all in and understand a bit, but you are such a great stupid, so I must leave it alone and wait till I get a chance to speak to Mrs. Molvern about it—she has got a bit of sense in her if you havent," and his revengeful face made poor little Edith shudder. Indeed she was now too frightened to answer, and she kept on trying to go home every time she got the chance, but Burke's quick eye caught her every time.

Edith walked on slowly in front thinking what was the best way to cheer Burke out of his most moodful mind. At last she hit on a plan.

"Burke," she said, "I have painted such a pretty little tray, it will just hold a cup of tea and a plate of toast and the paint is quite dry now, if you will come in and have a cup of tea with me today, I will gladly show it to you."

This short but cheerful conversation of Edith's made Burke quite forget their quarrel, and he turned round and said, "I will willingly come Edith, I know your good painting—hark, there is four o'clock striking now."

"So it is," said Edith pulling her hat more over her fringe.

Burke and Edith walked down the quiet little village in which their houses stood.

At last they arrived at Edith's house which was much prettier than Mrs. Molvern's.

"Dont you think," said Burke as he advanced to it with firm stride, "that you had better ring the bell, as you have a visitor with you?"

"Oh no," said Edith, "my mother would be sure to say if she knew it was I, that I was never to ring again, giving all that trouble to the servants; it isnt as if you were alone."

"Very well," said Burke, "I only thought perhaps it was best."

Edith smiled at him as she went up the front door steps. She led him into her pretty little bed-room to take off his things while she took off hers.

"How very comfortable it all looks," said Burke, "I feel quite inclined to write a note at that pretty little table there."

"Oh indeed but you shant," said Edith just beginning her snappy temper, but Burke forgot to reply to her.

They then went down and had some tea and Burke much admired the pretty tray of Edith's. They had for tea some cold ham (the remainder of the luncheon) some toasted buns, a sago pudding, a dried bloater and a couple of shrimps.

After this Edith threatened to hate Burke if he would not arrange about the marriage.

"Look here, I wish you would talk of something else," said Burke, "I have a good mind not to marry you at all."

But at this Edith clung so wretchedly to his knees that he had to say, "Well, tomorrow morning."

So that next morning Burke walked along down the village trying to make out where his own dear Edith could be.

Just as he was thinking of going up to her house he saw Norah Mackie and Evelyn Slattery coming along together.

"Your friend," they said chaffingly, "is picking some old geraniums in the front garden."

Burke stared at them straight and putting out his tongue once or twice, walked on to find his darling pet.

"I wish my sister Mary was here," echoed Evelyn, "she would soon strike out at you." And they walked on grumbling at his impudence.

"Well pretty dear," said Burke as he approached Edith's garden.

"Angel! I have been waiting for you to come and talk about the wedding."

"Yes I am perfectly settled," said Burke, and he began: "I have written to my people and they have written back to say yes I may marry you, and kind Mrs. Molvern is having such a nice wedding suit made for me, and I think we will be prepared to receive the Sacrament of Matrimony next Thursday."

"Thank you so much," said Edith, "suppose we talk about it now here on this sunny bench."

Burke lifted up his coat tails and squatted himself down.

"The first thing to find out about," he said, "is about asking Father Fanty to marry us."

"Yes, now I have hit upon a plan this very minute," said Edith, "you will write a letter to him. I have got a rather crumpled bit of paper in my pocket, and as most men have got a pen in their pockets most likely you have got one."

"Indeed I have," said Burke, "and a threepenny blotter too."

As for ink, Edith had a halfpenny bottle in her pocket. So Burke began like this:

DEAR REV. FATHER FANTY,

I hope your kindness does not mind marrying us Miss Edith Plush and myself. We are both capable of receiving the Sacrament of Matrimony on Thursday next if quite convenient to you. Hoping you will excuse my craving for Matrimony.

Yours sincerely
THOMAS HENRICK

Burke told Edith's maid to run to the Presbytery with the letter and wait for an answer. About a quarter of an hour afterwards this exquisite and most graceful letter came from Father Fanty:

MOST DEAR T. HENRICK,

On Thursday I am free from all engagement and am most willing to marry you, and give a charming wedding breakfast in my lovely harmonium room. So with my best congratulations on your coming marriage,

I am,
Your affectionate priest
FATHER FANTY

So on the following Thursday Burke and Edith were dressed as I shall mention now. The timid darling lady had on a most

lovely sky blue coloured dress with a high bustle, and it was blossomed over with sham daisies tied on with green ribbon. On her head she wore a wreath of yellow roses, and her white veil reached down to the top of her stays. White kid gloves, and as the sleeves of her dress were rather short, her red beef coloured hands showed between. She had pretty white velvet boots with grass green buttons, and washed out red stockings. In her hand she held a bunch of green ivy.

The strong and bold bridegroom wore a red swallow tailed coat, with a green silk sash tied in front. He had black knickerbockers and white woollen socks, and black dressing-slippers, and he carried a bowler in his hand.

When they arrived at the church the marriage was splendid, but the bare legs of Burke were not much appreciated.

For the wedding breakfast they had several cups of Bouillon Fleet, and eight of Bovril. They had six vanilla cream puddings and strawberry ices by the score; but they kept the blinds drawn down in case vulgar little boys should loom in and say " give us a slice," while the leg of pork was being cut.

For their honeymoon, they went to the south of India, and seven hours after they got there they had two twin babies, a boy and a girl which they called Abraham and Sarah, because they were fond of those holy saints.

So we will say goodbye to this two chaptered story.

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JOSEPH KESSEL

THE GOATEE

ONE night a little before Christmas, it occurred to me to go and have a drink with Hippolyte.

I knew both the bar and the time at which he was sure to be found there, for Hippolyte, during the course of his idle and mysterious day, had certain fixed ports at which nothing could prevent his calling. Indeed, before I even pushed the door open, I saw, through the misty glass pane of winter, his huge figure standing at the counter.

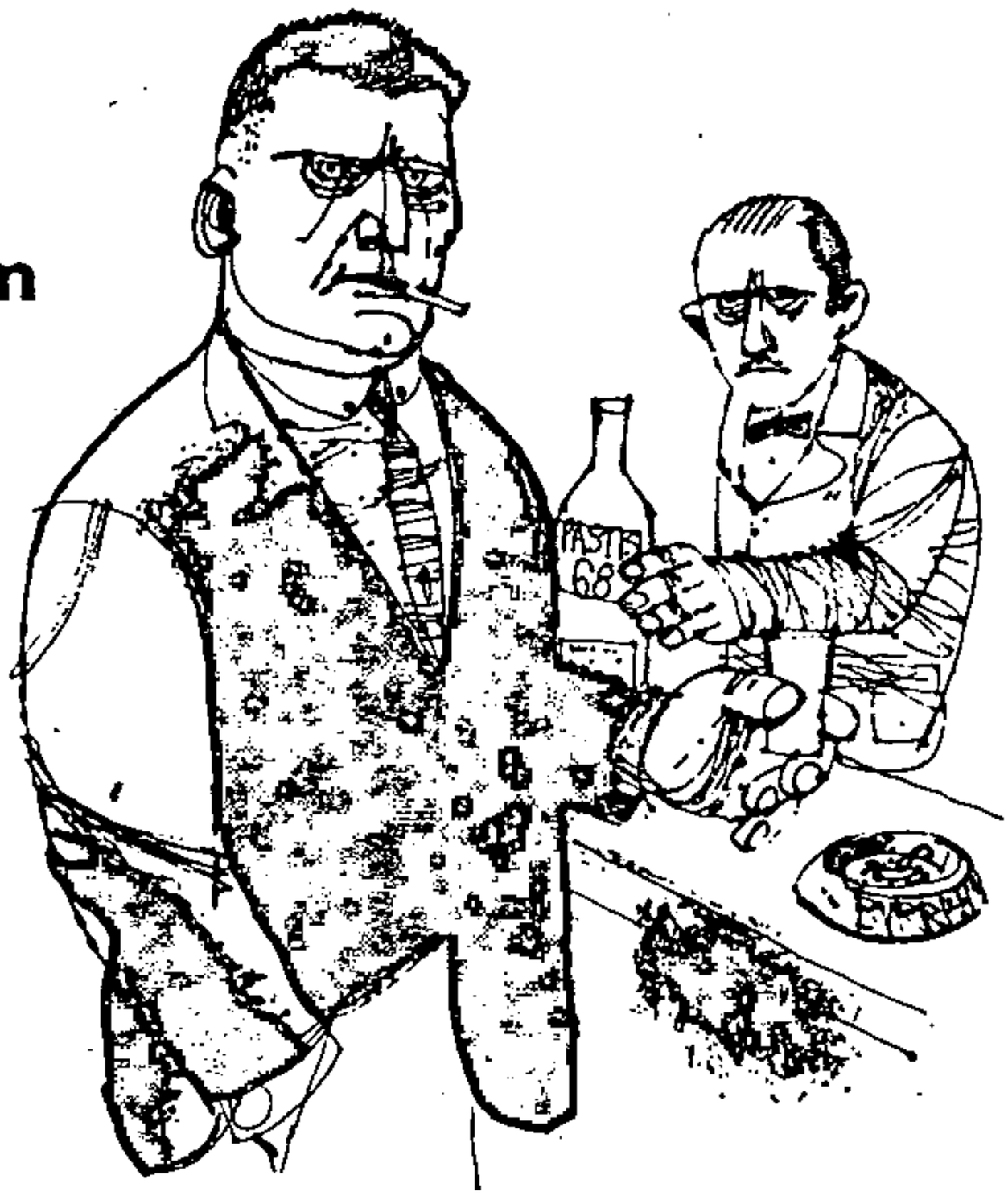
He had adopted his usual attitude and was standing at the centre of the bar as if that commanding position was the only one proper to him. His hands were in his pockets and he appeared not to notice anyone. Besides, his head was so high above other people's that disdain was natural to him.

I stood there a few seconds before going in. I like men and places for the reveries they arouse. And in this respect nothing could have been more effective than the spectacle before me.

The damp, misty pane through which I was watching the bar lent him a secret, distorted halo. I knew that the people who gathered here lived dangerous, violent, treacherous lives. I knew that Hippolyte dominated them all. He had great strength, a sort of sombre courage and a determination that was no particular merit to him since it was derived from cast-iron muscles and a temperament wholly peculiar to himself.

He had known the stews and prisons of the world. He had fought for himself, his women, his friends and, on occasion,

He held his head high — disdain was natural to him



his country which he unwittingly loved. All this gave him a sort of magnetism; and it was so powerful that passers-by hastening along the little Montmartre street in which I now stood in the cold, could not resist slowing their pace as they passed the bar and taking a look at the solid, motionless colossus that was Hippolyte, standing at the counter.

I opened the door. Though he appeared to notice nothing in his monumental indolence, he saw me at once. It did not surprise me. I was used to his perpetual and unconscious watchfulness.

Hippolyte turned his square chin towards me. The layer of fat covering it could not conceal its tragic characteristics of obstinacy and pride. He did not remove his hands from his pockets but I was aware, from a sort of gleam in his sultry eyes, that he was pleased to see me.

"What'll you have, my lad?" he asked, with no more emphasis than if we had parted that very morning, when in fact I had not seen him for months.

The men drinking at the counter had clearly no wish to make room for me. For them, it was not so much a matter of convenience or mere casualness as of honour. Nevertheless, at the affectionate tone in which Hippolyte addressed me—and one had to know him well to distinguish the shade of difference in his impassive voice—they moved aside without

a murmur to allow me to join him. Indeed, to show their deference, they even made a little space round us.

Hippolyte appreciated this sort of homage. He became slightly more animated and his face, still as a bronze statue's, came alive for a moment.

"I'm glad you came," he said. "I was bored."

He fell silent. I drank the drink he had ordered for me. With a mere glance, he ordered another and took some notes from his pocket. I made no attempt to argue. Hippolyte did not permit one to pay when in his company.

"I'll take you to dine at a quiet little place," he said.

In fact, the place was as quiet as you could want. It was a room behind a wine bar where normally only the owner and his servant ate. They had scarcely finished their meal when we arrived.

"We'll leave the place to you," the man said to Hippolyte, with that mixture of respect and fear my companion always aroused. "Jeanne will prepare you a nice plate of tripe."

"I shall enjoy that," Hippolyte replied.

Then, as if these few words had been a priceless gift, he withdrew his attention from the man.

We sat down opposite each other. It was very hot in the little room. Next door, we could hear slow working-men's voices, and the clink of glasses against the zinc of the counter.

"I like that," Hippolyte muttered, with a gesture of despair. "I'm getting old."

"You're not yet forty," I said.

He shrugged. It was a familiar gesture. When Samson pulled down the bronze columns, I thought, he must have suffered from the same terrible impatience.

"I learned in the army that the years of campaigning count double," Hippolyte went on. "You can see, therefore, how many years mine add up to. You see it's like this. When holidays come along nowadays, I'm bored. I'd rather there were no more Christmas and no New Year. What's the use of them? People look as if they could have the moon for the asking. But none of it means anything to me any more. And I'm bored."

The servant came in with a steaming dish. Hippolyte ate without haste and in silence.

I liked Hippolyte's silences. There was a sort of animal transparency about them that made them easy to tolerate. While they lasted, you could see his thought wandering across his usually expressionless face like some clumsy insect. And

after even an hour, he always took up the conversation again at the precise phrase at which it had ceased and, since he was incapable of discussion, he recounted a fact. And the fact invariably turned out to be an astonishing story.

Hippolyte said not a word till we reached the coffee.

"I'm bored," he then went on. "And yet, I've got as much money as I want," (indeed, his pockets were always stuffed with money, though I never knew where it came from) "and more women than I can do with. And you saw, when you knew me at Beirut, what that means to me. I ought to be happy. Well, the fact is I'm bored. Suppose I tell you I'm always thinking of things that happened twenty years ago! The things that happened in the days when I was unfortunate. For instance, all today I haven't been able to rid my mind of the curious recollection of a certain Christmas, a very odd Christmas.

"The trouble is that, with you, I shall have to start right at the beginning. You don't know about life. You don't understand unless things are explained to you. Light a cigarette and sit still, and I'll tell you about it.

"At the time, I wasn't much more than twenty. I was as slender as a dancer and, I can tell you, there aren't all that many good-looking youngsters today as well-built as I was. You know Louis and you can ask him. We're the same age. In those days he was called the Corsican, and I was called the Algerian, because of where we were born. I'd already been about a bit; Morocco, Alexandria, Palestine. And I'd taken some hard knocks in all of them. I arrived in Paris in a rage and, as you can imagine, I didn't want to do any military service. I wanted enough to eat and to have a bit of fun. Things went badly with me till the day I met Juliette.

"I must tell you things as they were: it wasn't I but she, who had the idea of the trick. Since I was a good-looking youngster, the South Americans who came to Paris for new blood would come to me to find them women to take away. They'd pay two or three thousand francs per head. But I was young and bungling, and to tell you the truth I didn't like the job. It was Juliette who persuaded me. I gave her to the first purchaser, merely with her skirt and a tattered old dress. He dressed her like a queen and took her to Bordeaux. But there she slipped through his fingers and returned to me. We arranged it between us. I sold her five times. She was vicious and always managed to get back to me. The traffickers

couldn't go to the police. As for seeking me out, I was dangerous. And they knew it.

"I had a good life all that summer. The only thing is, one always has to pay for these irregularities.

"I was given away to the police as a defaulter from military service. By whom? A South American? By Juliette, who was in love with someone else and was afraid of me? I don't know.

"One way or another, I was picked up and sent off to the battalions in Africa. I don't know what the journey's like today. The army's become softer than it was in the days I'm talking of; and it's just as well, because I'm damned if the boys you see about today could take what we could take.

"On the train and in the ship, we were chained in pairs. You can imagine what that was like. Herded like animals, you couldn't move without hearing those damned irons ring and tugging at your neighbour. And he couldn't move without making your ankle ring.

"If you had a good comrade on your chain, it was less bad, but he had to be a really good one. And I had no luck. I recognised the man I was paired with at once. He was a tall, thin, tow-headed, dirty fellow, whom I'd constantly seen about in Montmartre. His was the worst of all trades, a beggar's. He used to beg with a false blind eye which he fixed with some ointment.

"Beggars disgust me more than anything. They're not men. And I had to be tied to this one for weeks and weeks.

"In spite of what I thought, I behaved very well to him. Don't imagine I was kind, I'm not kind. I'm correct, which is not the same thing. In misfortune, one must have principles. The beggar was a companion in misfortune, he had no money, nothing to buy food with. I had a little and shared it with him. It being his nature to extend his hand, he made no difficulties about accepting it. He behaved pretty decently and I didn't regret what I was doing for him.

"I won't bore you with the disembarkation and the start of our military training. I've even forgotten the name of the village to which we were first taken. We were not too unhappy. I behaved well. And I've always liked arms. Besides, at that time, I didn't much mind what I ate or where I slept. All I asked was not to be shut in all the time. As a result of my good conduct, I was allowed out two or three times a week to go and have a drink and a woman.

"All might have gone well and I might perhaps have served

my time quietly—I say perhaps, because one can never be sure of oneself, can one?—if one evening . . .

" Wait a minute, I realise I've forgotten to tell you that my chain-companion, the beggar, had been made a corporal. Considering the sort of boot-licker he was, there was nothing surprising about that. Well, one evening when I was going down to the town, he was on the barrack guard.

" I said to him, ' Be seeing you, lad . . .' And I went out.

" I'd only gone a step or two when I heard him shout, ' Come here, Private Hippolyte!'

" I turned, thinking he was joking. I saw he was furiously angry. He started shouting, ' Can't you salute? About turn, and get back into barracks!'

" I'd been quite still till then. Now, I became angry. Luckily for me, however, I saw red to such an extent that I never thought of the bayonet at my belt. I hit him with my fist. There he was on the ground and his filthy beggar's face had a whining expression on it again. He thought he could pull his stripes over a chap who'd shared his bread with him.

" I had no time to hit him again. The guard jumped on me.

" Cells, court martial and the rest. My period of service was extended and I was sent to a penal battalion in the desert, building roads. Before leaving, I told a friend of mine, called Achille, the whole story. He was an old soldier, and had guts if anyone had. A fortnight after I'd left, the beggar was found in an alley with a bayonet in his back. Since it was his own, no-one ever knew who had made use of it.

" I only heard this later, after what I'm going to tell you about—and this is what's worrying me. It's taken me a long time to reach them, but I couldn't tell you about them without telling you something of what had happened before and of the sort of chap I was . . .

" Well, there I was in the desert, and I found out what it meant to be really miserable. During the day, the heat was enough to drive you mad, and at night it was cold enough to freeze your stomach for you. We slept on the stones we broke during the day; we were given filth to eat; and we drank water that had to be fetched from kilometres away and arrived putrid in stinking goatskins. If you stopped work for a second you were hit with a rifle-butt, and there were Senegalese all around just waiting to shoot you.

" In spite of everything, I bore it all without flinching. And I hope you realise that it was not fear of a bullet that kept me

quiet. I bore it all because we had a most unusual lieutenant.

"He was a Corsican and was called Salvi. In general, Corsicans are good or bad all through. This one was good all through. He was fair, straightforward and understood men. A proper commander. When he asked a man 'Everything all right?' there was not one among us, however browned off, however mutinous, who would not reply, 'Quite all right, sir.'

"To what was this due? I'm not clever enough to be able to say. He was short, lean, had sad eyes and a little beard. It was the beard I liked him for. When someone had to be punished, he had a way of twisting it which showed he disliked the business.

"I had spent a month in the desert. It was getting towards the end of December. Then a funny thing happened. The men with me were not much given to sentiment. Yet they all began to think of Christmas, and its accompanying rejoicings. They became uneasy, sad, sickened. Some—and not always the youngest—wept. I said nothing. I clenched my teeth. But it was having its effect on me, too. It became worse every day. In the end I fell into a deep depression.

"You chaps don't know what the *cafard* in the desert is like. It's the *cafard* of the sun and of the sand. There's no end to it and no way out. You go mad, you fall into the deepest depression, there's no other possible description of it.

"Then, you think up the most terrible thing you can do, but the most terrible against yourself. You don't know you're thinking it up, but someone, inside you, is thinking it up for you . . .

"On the morning of December 24th—you see how I remember the date—our section was inspected, as it was every morning, by Lieutenant Salvi. I looked at him and I liked him and his little beard more than ever. And suddenly I said to myself, 'I'll pull his goatee for him.' I stepped out of the ranks, I went up to him, and I pulled out a good handful of hairs.

"I shall always remember the lieutenant's eyes. They were sadder than usual, but not at all angry. It was my comrades who were angry instead. He didn't have to utter a word. They beat me up so violently that I lost consciousness.

"I came to in a silo. Don't you know what that is? Well, imagine a sort of well, dug fairly deep, full of scorpions and insects, just large enough to allow you to roll yourself into a ball. In the desert, they throw prisoners into them. You can't get out without a rope. And, if you had one, there's a Senegalese up above to spit you if you show your head.

"But even if I had had a rope and a comrade to pull me out of the silo and deal with the Senegalese, I don't think I'd have tried anything. I was like someone who has done his best friend a damage when drunk and wants to die when he's sober again. At least, I didn't have to worry about that. I had attacked a superior officer on active service. I would be shot tomorrow. I had no regrets. I was even glad.

"The only thing about being glad in that sort of way is that you mustn't think too much if you want it to last. And I had all night. And what a night! It was freezing.

"I thought of my father, who was still alive at that time. He was a good old chap, you know, a cobbler at Bizerta. He didn't really know what sort of blackguard his son had become. I had managed to conceal it from him.

"Morning took a long time coming, but it came all the same. I heard the company falling in by the silo. My eyes were burning. I was feverish. I thought of my old man. And yet, when they took me out of the hole, I pút on a bold face.

"But face to face with the lieutenant, I hadn't the courage to look at him.

"'I'd have had you shot like a dog,' he said. 'You deserve no better. But I've looked up your file. You've got an honest father. Because of him, you'll merely get this!'

"Before I had time to grasp what he meant, I felt one cheek burn like fire, then the other. He had cut my face open with his whip. Then . . . You know, I've never allowed anyone to lay a finger on me, neither on my face or elsewhere, but particularly my face. But that Christmas Day I saluted, swallowed the blood that was running into my mouth and said, 'Thank you, sir.'"

For a long time past Hippolyte had not looked at me. He was staring at his hands.

When he had finished his story and raised his eyes, I realised that he had forgotten my presence. For his face immediately assumed an expression half-embarrassed, half-angry. Against me for having heard him out? Against himself for having stripped himself naked?

"Leave me alone," he said.

His voice was low and dangerous. His hands, which till now had been lying flat on the table, suddenly contracted into hard masses of flesh and bone, like pieces of rock. He was controlling with difficulty a longing to wipe me out.

And yet Hippolyte was fond of me.

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Sempé

The 32-year-old French cartoonist returns to Argosy with a Parisian view of the Treasure Island theme

" Yes, this is really Treasure Island. It is I who made the plan. I AM the treasure."

SEAN O'FAOLAIN

Two of a Kind

She'd be tall and thin, real la-di-da—and under it all she'd be soft as mountain moss

MAXER CREEDON was not drunk, but he was melancholy-drunk, and he knew it and he was afraid of it.

At first he had loved being there in the jammed streets, with everybody who passed him carrying parcels wrapped in green or gold, tied with big red ribbons and fixed with berried holly sprigs. Whenever he bumped into someone, parcels toppled and they both cried "Ooops!" or "Sorree!" and laughed at one another. A star of snow sank nestling into a woman's hair. He smelled pine and balsam. He saw twelve golden angels blaring silently from twelve golden trumpets in Rockefeller Plaza. He pointed out to a cop that when the traffic lights down Park Avenue changed from red to green the row of white Christmas trees away down the line changed colour by reflection. The cop was very grateful to him. The haze of light on the tops of the buildings made a halo over Fifth Avenue. It was all just the way he knew it would be, and he slopping down from Halifax in that damned old tanker.

Then, suddenly, he swung his right arm in a wild arc of disgust; "To hell with 'em! To hell with everybody!"

"Ooops! Hoho, there! Sorree!"

He refused to laugh back.

"Poor Creedon!" he said to himself. "All alone in New York, on Christmas-bloody-well-Eve, with nobody to talk to, and nowhere to go only back to the bloody old ship. New York all lit up. Everybody all lit up. Except poor old Creedon."

He began to cry for poor old Creedon. Crying, he reeled through the passing feet. The next thing he knew he was sitting at the counter of an Eighth Avenue café sucking black coffee, with one eye screwed-up to look out at the changing traffic lights, chuckling happily over a yarn his mother used to tell him long ago about a place called Ballyroche. He had been there only once, nine years ago, for her funeral. Beaming into his coffee cup, or looking out at the changing traffic lights, he went through his favourite yarn about Poor Lily.

"Ah, wisha! Poor Lily! I wonder where is she atall, atall now. Or is she dead or alive. It all happened through an Italian who used to be going from one farm to another selling painted statues. Bandello his name was, a handsome black divil o' hell! I never in all my born days saw a more handsome divil. Well, one wet, wild, windy October morning what did she do but creep out of bed and we all sound asleep and go off with him. Often and often I heard my father say that the last seen of her was standing under the big tree at Ballyroche Cross, sheltering from the rain, at about eight o'clock in the morning. It was Mikey Clancy the postman saw her. 'Yerrah, Lily girl,' says he, 'what are you doing here at this hour of the morning?' 'I'm waiting,' says she, 'for to go into Fareens on the milk cart.' And from that day to this not a sight nor a sound of her no more than if the earth had swallowed her. Except for the one letter from a priest in America to say she was happily married in Brooklyn, New York."

Maxer chuckled again. The yarn always ended up with the count of the years. The last time he heard it the count had reached forty-one. By this year it would have been fifty.

Maxer put down his cup. For the first time in his life it came to him that the yarn was a true story about a real woman. For as long as four traffic-light changes he fumbled with this fact. Then, like a man hearing a fog signal come again and again from an approaching ship, and at last hearing it close at hand, and then seeing an actual if dim shape, wrapped in a cocoon of haze, the great idea revealed itself.

He lumbered down from his stool and went over to the telephones. His lumpish finger began to trace its way down the grey pages among the Brooklyn Bans. His finger stopped. He read the name aloud. *Bandello, Mrs. Lily.* He found a dime, tinkled it home, and dialled the number slowly. On the third ring he heard an old woman's voice. Knowing that she would be very old and might be deaf, he said very loudly

and with the extra-meticulous enunciation of all drunks, "My name is Matthew Creedon. Only my friends all call me Maxer. I come from Limerick, Ireland. My mother came from the townland of Ballyroche. Are you by any chance my Auntie Lily?"

Her reply was a bark: "What do you want?"

"Nothing at all! Only I thought, if you are the lady in question, that we might have a bit of an ould gosther. I'm a sailor. Docked this morning in the Hudson."

The voice was still hard and cold. "Did somebody tell you to call me?"

He began to get cross with her.

"Naw! Just by a fluke I happened to look up your name in the directory. I often heard my mother talking about you. I just felt I'd like to talk to somebody. Being Christmas and all to that. And knowing nobody in New York. But if you don't like the idea, it's okay with me. I don't want to butt in on anybody. Goodbye."

"Wait! You're sure nobody sent you?"

"Inspiration sent me! Father Christmas sent me!" (She could take that any way she bloody-well liked!) "Look, it seems to me I'm buttin' in. Let's skip it."

"No. Why don't you come over and see me?"

Suspiciously he said, "This minute?"

"Right away!"

At the sudden welcome of her voice all his annoyance vanished.

"Sure, Auntie Lily! I'll be right over. But, listen, I sincerely hope you're not thinking I'm buttin' in. Because if you are..."

"It was very nice of you to call me, Matty, very nice indeed. I'll be glad to see you."

He hung up, grinning. She was just like his mother—the same old Limerick accent. After fifty years. And the same bossy voice. If she was a day she'd be seventy. She'd be tall, and thin, and handsome, and the real la-di-da, doing the grand lady, and under it all she'd be as soft as mountain moss. She'd be tidying the house now like the divil. And giving jaw to ould Bandello. If he was still alive.

He got lost on the subway, so that when he came up it was dark. He paused to have another black coffee. Then he paused to buy a bottle of Jamaica rum as a present for her. And then he had to walk five blocks before he found

the house where she lived. The automobiles parked under the lights were all snow-covered. She lived in a brownstone house with high steps. Six other families also had rooms in it.

The minute he saw her on top of the not-brightly-lit landing, looking down at him, he saw something he had completely forgotten. She had his mother's height, and slimness, and her wide mouth, but he had forgotten the pale, liquid blue of the eyes and they stopped him dead on the stairs, his hand tight on the banister. At the sight of them he heard the soft wind sighing over the level Limerick plain and his whole body shivered. For miles and miles not a sound but that soughing wind that makes the meadows and the wheat fields flow like water. All over that plain, where a crossroads is an event, where a little, sleepy lake is an excitement. Where their streams are rivers to them. Where their villages are towns. The resting cows look at you out of owls' eyes over the greasy tips of the buttercups. The meadow grass is up to their bellies. Those two pale eyes looking down at him were bits of the pale albino sky stretched tightly over the Shannon plain.

Slowly he climbed up to meet her, but even when they stood side by side she was still able to look down at him, searching his face with her pallid eyes. He knew what she was looking for, and he knew she had found it when she threw her bony arms around his neck and broke into a low, soft wailing just like that Shannon wind.

"Auntie! You're the living image of her!"

On the click of a finger she became bossy and cross with him, hauling him by his two hands into her room.

"You've been drinking! And what delayed you? And I suppose not a scrap of solid food in your stomach since morning?"

He smiled humbly.

"I'm sorry, Auntie. 'Twas just on account of being all alone, you know. And everybody else making whoopee." He hauled out the peace offering of the rum. "Let's have a drink!"

She was fussing all over him immediately.

"You gotta eat something first. Drinking like that all day, I'm ashamed of you! Sit down, boy. Take off your jacket. I got coffee, and cookies, and hamburgers, and a pie; I always lay in a stock for Christmas. All of the neighbours visit me. Everybody knows that Lily Bandello keeps

an open house for Christmas, nobody is ever going to say Lily Bandello didn't have a welcome for all her friends and relations at Christmas-time . . ."

She bustled in and out of the kitchenette, talking back to him without stop.

It was a big, dusky room, himself looking at himself out of a tall, mirrored wardrobe piled on top with cardboard boxes. There was a divan in one corner as high as a bed, and he guessed that there was a washbasin behind the old peacock-screen. A single bulb hung in the centre of the ceiling, in a fluted glass bell with pink frilly edges. The pope over the bed was Leo XIII. The snowflakes kept touching the bare window panes like kittens' paws trying to get in. When she began on the questions, he wished he had not come.

"How's Bid?" she called out from the kitchen.

"Bid? My mother? Oh, well, of course, I mean to say . . . My mother? Oh, she's grand, Auntie! Never better. For her age, of course, that is. Fine, fine out! Just like yourself. Only for the touch of the old rheumatism now and again."

"Go on, tell me about all of them. How's Uncle Matty? And how's Cis? When were you down in Ballyroche last? But, sure, it's all changed now I suppose, with electric light and everything up to date? And I suppose the old pony and trap is gone years ago? It was only last night I was thinking of Mikey Clancy the postman." She came in, planking down the plates, an iced Christmas cake, the coffeepot. "Go on! You're telling me nothing."

She stood over him, waiting, her pale eyes wide, her mouth stretched.

He said, "My Uncle Matty? Oh well, of course, now, he's not as young as he was. But I saw him there last year. He was looking fine. Fine out. I'd be inclined to say he'd be a bit stooped. But in great form. For his age, that is."

"Sit in. Eat up. Eat up. Don't mind me. He has a big family now, no doubt?"

"A family? Naturally! There's Tom. And there's Kitty, that's my Aunt Kitty, it *is* Kitty, isn't it, yes, my Auntie Kitty. And . . . God, I can't remember the half of them."

She shoved the hamburgers towards him. She made him pour the coffee and tell her if he liked it. She told him he was a bad reporter.

"Tell me all about the old place!"

He stuffed his mouth to give him time to think.

"They have twenty-one cows. Holsteins. The black and

white chaps. And a red barn. And a shelter-belt of pines. 'Tis lovely there now to see the wind in the trees, and when the night falls the way the lighthouse starts winking at you, and . . ."

"What lighthouse?" She glared at him. She drew back from him. "Are ye daft? What are you dreaming about? Is it a lighthouse in the middle of the County Limerick?"

"There is a lighthouse! I saw it in the harbour!"

But he suddenly remembered that where he had seen it was in a toyshop on Eighth Avenue, with a farm beyond it and a red barn and small cows, and a train going round it all.

"Harbour, Matty? Are ye out of your senses?"

"I saw it with my own two eyes."

Her eyes were like marbles. Suddenly she leaned over like a willow—just the way his mother used to lean over—and laughed and laughed.

"I know what you're talking about now. The lighthouse on the Shannon! Lord save us, how many times did I see it at night from the hill of Ballingarry! But there's no harbour, Matty."

"There's the harbour at Foynes!"

"Oh, for God's sake!" she cried. "That's miles and miles and miles away. 'Tis and twenty miles away! And where could you see any train, day or night, from anywhere at all near Ballyroche?"

They argued it hither and over until she suddenly found that the coffee had gone cold and rushed away with the pot to the kitchen. Even there she kept up the argument, calling out that certainly, you could see Moneygay Castle, and the turn of the River Deel on a fine day, but no train, and then she went on about the stepping stones over the river, and came back babbling about Normoyle's bull that chased them across the dry river, one hot summer's day . . .

He said, "Auntie! Why the hell did you never write home?"

"Not even once?" she said, with a crooked smile like a bold child.

"Not a sight nor a sound of you from the day you left Ballyroche, as my mother used to say, no more than if the earth swallowed you. You're a nice one!"

"Eat up!" she commanded him, with a little laugh and a tap on his wrist.

"Did you always live here, Auntie Lily?"

She sat down and put her face between her palms with her elbows on the table and looked at him.

"Here? Well, no . . . That is to say, no! My husband and me had a house of our very own over in East Fifty-eighth. He did very well for himself. He was quite a rich man when he died. A big jeweller. When he was killed in an airplane crash five years ago he left me very well off. But sure I didn't need a house of my own and I had lots of friends in Brooklyn, so I came to live here."

"Fine! What more do you want, that is for a lone woman! No family?"

"I have my son. But he's married, to a Pole, they'll be over here first thing tomorrow morning to take me off to spend Christmas with them. They have an apartment on Riverside Drive. He is the manager of a big department store, Macy's on Flatbush Avenue. But tell me about Bid's children. You must have lots of brothers and sisters. Where are you going from here? Back to Ireland? To Limerick? To Ballyroche?"

He laughed.

"Where else would I go? Our next trip we hit the port of London. I'll be back like an arrow to Ballyroche. They'll be delighted to hear I met you. They'll be asking me all sorts of questions about you. Tell me more about your son, Auntie. Has he a family?"

"My son? Well, my son's name is Thomas. His wife's name is Catherine. She is very beautiful. She has means of her own. They are very happy. He is very well off. He's in charge of a big store, Sears Roebuck on Bedford Avenue. Oh, a fine boy. Fine out! As you say. Fine out. He has three children. There's Cissy, and Matty. And . . ."

Her voice faltered. When she closed her eyes he saw how old she was. She rose and from the bottom drawer of a chest of drawers she pulled out a photograph album. She laid it in front of him and sat back opposite him.

"That's my boy."

When he said he was like her she said he was very like his father. Maxer said that he often heard that her husband was a most handsome man.

"Have you a picture of him?"

She drew the picture of her son towards her and looked down at it.

"Tell me more about Ballyroche," she cried.

As he started into a long description of a harvest home he saw her eyes close again, and her breath came more heavily and he felt that she was not hearing a word he said.

Then, suddenly, her palm slapped down on the picture of the young man, and he knew that she was not heeding him any more than if he wasn't there. Her fingers closed on the pasteboard. She shied it wildly across the room, where it struck the glass of the window flat on, hesitated and slid to the ground. Maxer saw snowflakes melting as often as they touched the pane. When he looked back at her she was leaning across the table, one white lock down over one eye, her yellow teeth bared.

"You spy!" she spat at him. "You came from *them*! To spy on me!"

"I came from friendliness."

"Or was it for a ha'porth of look-about? Well, you can go back to Ballyroche and tell 'em whatever you like. Tell 'em I'm starving if that'll please 'em, the mean, miserable lousy set that never gave a damn about me from the day I left 'em. For forty years my own sister, your mother, never wrote one line to say . . ."

"You know damn well she'd have done anything for you if she only knew where you were. Her heart was stuck in you. The two of you were inside one another's pockets. My God, she was for ever talking and talking about you. Morning, noon and night . . ."

She shouted at him across the table, "I wrote six letters . . ."

"She never got them."

"I registered two of them."

"Nobody ever got a line from you, or about you, only for the one letter from the priest that married you to say you were well and happy."

"What he wrote was that I was down and out. I saw the letter. I let him send it. That louse left me flat in this city with my baby. I wrote to everybody—my mother, my father, to Bid after she was your mother and had a home of her own. I had to work every day of my life. I worked today. I'll work tomorrow. If you want to know what I do, I clean out offices. I worked to bring up my son, and what did he do? Walked out on me with that Pole of his and that was the last I saw of him, or her, or any human being belonging to me until I saw you. Tell them every word of it. They'll love it!"

Maxer got up and went over slowly to the bed for his jacket. As he buttoned it he looked at her glaring at him across the table. Then he looked away from her at the snowflakes feeling the window pane and dying there.

He said, quietly, "They're all dead. As for Limerick—I haven't been back to Ireland for eight years. When my mum died my father got married again. I ran away to sea when I was sixteen."

He took his cap. When he was at the door he heard a chair fall and then she was at his side, holding his arm, whispering gently to him.

"Don't go away, Matty." Her pallid eyes were flooded. "For God's sake, don't leave me alone with *them* on Christmas Eve!"

Maxer stared at her. Her lips were wavering as if a wind were blowing over them. She had the face of a frightened girl. He threw his cap on the bed and went over and sat down beside it. While he sat there like a big baboon, with his hands between his knees, looking at the snowflakes, she raced into the kitchen to put on the kettle for rum punch. It was a long while before she brought in the two big glasses of punch, with orange sliced in them, and brown sugar like drowned sand at the base of them. When she held them out to him he looked at them, and then at her, so timid, so pleading, and he began to laugh and laugh—a laugh that he choked by covering his eyes with his hands.

"Damn ye!" he groaned into his hands. "I was better off drunk."

She sat beside him on the bed. He looked up. He took one of the glasses and touched hers with it.

"Here's to Poor Lily!" he smiled.

She fondled his free hand.

"Lovie, tell me this one thing and tell me true. Did she really and truly talk about me? Or was that all lies too?"

"She'd be crying rain down when she'd be talking about you. She was always and ever talking about you. She was mad about you."

She sighed a long sigh.

"For years I couldn't understand it. But when my boy left me for that Pole I understood it. I guess Bid had a tough time bringing you all up. And there's no-one more hard in all the world than a mother when she's thinking of her own. I'm glad she talked about me. It's better than nothing."

They sat there on the bed talking and talking. She made more punch, and then more, and in the end they finished the bottle between them, talking about everybody either of them had known in or within miles of the County Limerick. They

fixed to spend Christmas Day together, and have Christmas dinner downtown, and maybe go to a picture and then come back and talk some more.

Every time Maxer comes to New York he rings her number. He can hardly breathe until he hears her voice saying, "Hello, Matty." They go on the town then and have dinner, always at some place with an Irish name, or a green neon shamrock above the door, and then they go to a movie or a show, and then come back to her room to have a drink and a talk about his last voyage, or the picture postcards he sent her, his latest bits and scraps of news about the Shannon shore. They always get first-class service in restaurants, although Maxer never noticed it until the night a waiter said, "And what's Mom having?" at which she gave him a slow wink out of her pale Limerick eyes and a slow, wide, lover's smile.

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"Well, there goes Emily — and our lunch!"

Faithful Wife

BY MORLEY CALLAGHAN

She held on to him as if she did not expect to be embraced again for a long time

UNTIL a week before Christmas George worked in the station restaurant at the lunch counter. The last week was extraordinarily cold, then the sun shone strongly for a few days, though it was always cold again in the evenings. There were three other men working at the counter. For years they must have had a poor reputation. Women, unless they were careless and easy-going, never started a conversation with them when having a light lunch at noontime. The girls at the station always avoided the red-capped porters and the countermen.

George, who was working there till he got enough money to go back home for a week and then start late in the year at college, was a young fellow with fine hair retreating far back on his forehead and rather bad upper teeth, but he was very polite and generous. Steve, the plump Italian with the waxed black moustache who had charge of the restaurant, was very fond of George.

Many people passed the restaurant window on the way to the platform and the trains. The four men, watching them frequently, got to know some of them. Girls, brightly dressed and highly powdered, loitered in front of the open door, smiling at George, who saw them so often he knew their first names. At noontime, other girls, with a few minutes to spare before going back to work, used to walk up and down the tiled tunnel to the waiting-room, loafing the time away, but they never even glanced in at the countermen. It was cold outside, the streets were slippery, and it was warm in the station, that was all. George got to know most of these girls too, and talked about them with the other fellows.

George watched carefully one girl every day at noon hour.

The other men had also noticed her, and two or three times she came in for a cup of coffee, but she was so gentle and aloofly pleasant, and so unobtrusively beyond them, they were afraid to try and amuse her with easy cheerful talk. George wished earnestly that she had never seen him there in the restaurant behind the counter, even though he knew she had never noticed him at all. Her cheeks were usually rosy from the cold wind outside. When she went out of the door to walk up and down for a few minutes, an agreeable expression on her face, she never once looked back at the restaurant. George, following her with his eyes while pouring coffee slowly, did not expect her to look back. She was about twenty-eight, pretty, rather shy, and dressed plainly and poorly in a thin blue-cloth coat without any fur on it. Most girls managed to have a piece of fur of some kind on their coats.

With little to do in the middle of the afternoon, George used to think of her because of seeing her every day and looking at her face in profile when she passed the window. Then, on the day she had the light-fawn felt hat on, she smiled politely at him when having a cup of coffee, and as long as possible he remained opposite her, cleaning the counter with a damp cloth.

The last night he worked at the station he went out at about half-past eight in the evening, for he had an hour to himself, and then worked on till ten o'clock. In the morning he was going home, so he walked out of the station and down the sidestreets to the docks, and was having only pleasant thoughts, passing the warehouses, looking out over the dark cold lake and liking the tang of the wind on his face. Christmas was only a week away. The snow was falling lazily and melting slowly when it hit the pavement. He was glad he was through with the job at the restaurant.

An hour later, back at the restaurant, Steve said, "A dame just phoned you, George, and left her number."

"Do you know who she was?"

"No, you got too many girls, George. Don't you know the number?"

"I never saw it before."

He called the number and did not recognise the voice that answered him. A woman was asking him pleasantly enough if he remembered her. He said he did not. She said she had had a cup of coffee that afternoon at noontime, and added that she had worn a blue coat and a light-fawn felt

hat, and even though she had not spoken to him, she thought he would remember her.

"Good lord," he said.

She wanted to know if he would come and see her at half-past ten that evening. Timidly he said he would, and hardly heard her giving the address. Steve and the other boys started to kid him brightly, but he was too astonished wondering how she had found out his name to bother with them. The boys, saying goodbye to him later, winked and elbowed him in the ribs, urging him to celebrate on his last night in the city. Steve, who was very fond of him, shook his head sadly and pulled the ends of his moustache down between his lips.

The address the girl had given him was only eight blocks away so he walked, holding his hands clenched tightly in his pockets, for he was cold from nervousness. He was watching the car headlights shining on slippery spots on the pavement. The house, opposite a school playground in a sidestreet, was a large old lodging house. A light was in a window on the second storey over the door. Ringing the bell, he didn't really expect anyone to answer, and was surprised when the girl herself opened the door. "Good evening," he said shyly.

"Oh, come upstairs," she said, smiling and practical.

In the front room he took off his overcoat and hat and sat down slowly, noticing, out of the corner of his eye, that she was very slender and had nice fair hair and lovely eyes. But she was moving very nervously. He had intended to ask at once how she found out his name, but forgot about it as soon as she sat down opposite him on a camp bed and smiled shyly. She had on a red woollen sweater, fitting her tightly at the waist. Twice he shook his head, unable to get used to having her there opposite him, nervous and expectant. The trouble was she had always seemed so aloof.

"You're not very friendly," she said awkwardly.

"Oh, yes, I am. Indeed I am."

"Why don't you come over here and sit beside me?"

Slowly he sat down beside her on the camp bed, smiling stupidly. He was even slow to see that she was waiting for him to put his arms around her. Ashamed of himself, he finally kissed her eagerly and she held on to him tightly. Her heart was thumping underneath the red woollen sweater. She just kept on holding him, almost savagely, closing her eyes slowly and breathing deeply every time he kissed her. She was so delighted and satisfied to hold him in her arms that she did not bother talking at all. Finally he became very eager and

she got up suddenly, walking up and down the room, looking occasionally at the cheap alarm clock on the bureau.

"What's the matter?" he said irritably.

"My girl friend, the one I share with, will be home in twenty minutes."

"Come here, anyway."

"Please sit down, please do," she said.

Slowly she sat down beside him. When he kissed her she did not object, but her lips were dry, her shoulders were trembling, and she kept on watching the clock. Though she was holding his wrist so tightly her nails dug into the skin, he knew she would be glad when he had to go. He kissed her again and she drew her left hand slowly over her lips.

"You must be out of here before Irene comes," she said.

"But I've only kissed and hugged you and you're wonderful." He noticed the red ring mark on her finger. "Are you sure you're not waiting for your husband to come home?" he said, a bit irritably.

Frowning, looking away vaguely, she said, "Why do you have to say that?"

"There's a ring mark on your finger."

"I can't help it," she said, and began to cry quietly. "Yes, oh, yes, I'm waiting for my husband to come home. He'll be here at Christmas."

"It's too bad. Can't we do something about it?"

"I tell you I love my husband. I do, I really do, and I'm faithful to him, too."

"Maybe I'd better go," he said uncomfortably.

"Eh, what's that? My husband, he's in a sanatorium. He got his spine hurt in the war, then he got tuberculosis. He's pretty bad. They've got to carry him around. We want to love each other every time we meet, but we can't."

"That's tough, and I suppose you've got to pay for him?"

"Yes."

"Do you have many fellows?"

"No. I don't want to have any."

"Do they come here to see you?"

"No. No, I don't know what got into me. I liked you, and felt a little crazy."

"I'll slide along, then. What's your first name?"

"Lola. You'd better go now."

"Couldn't I see you again?" he said suddenly.

"No, you're going away tomorrow," she smiled confidently.

"So you've got it all figured out. Supposing I don't go?"

"Please, you must."

Her arms were trembling when she held his overcoat. She wanted him to go before Irene came home. "You didn't give me much time," he said flatly.

"No. Irene comes in at this time. You're a lovely boy. Kiss me."

"You had that figured out, too."

"Just kiss and hold me once more, George."

She held on to him as if she did not expect to be embraced again for a long time, and he said, "I think I'll stay in the city a while longer."

"It's too bad, but you've got to go. We can't see each other again."

In the poorly-lighted hall she looked lovely. Her cheeks were flushed, and though still eager, she was quite satisfied with the whole affair. Everything had gone perfectly for her.

As he went out of the door and down the drive to the street, he remembered that he hadn't asked how she had found out his name. Snow was falling lightly and there were hardly any footprints on the pavement. All he could think of was that he ought to go back to the restaurant and ask Steve for his job again. Steve was fond of him. But he knew he could not spoil it for her. "She had it all figured out," he muttered, turning up his coat collar.

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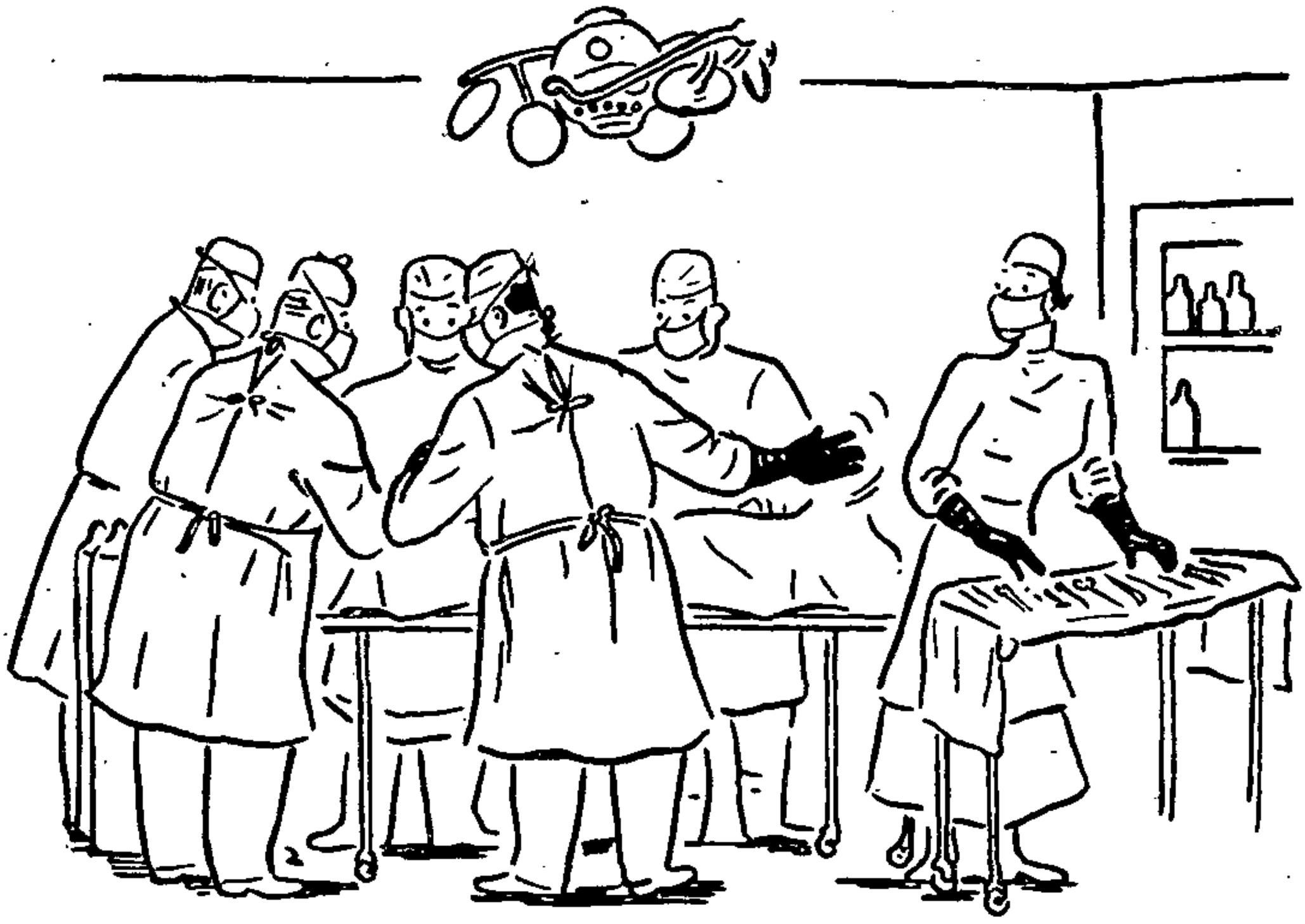


"Thingumajig!"

FISHERMAN'S DROUGHT

by ALAN SCHOLEFIELD

IF a psychologist sat me down now and gave me one of those word-reaction tests and said, "Depression," I'd probably answer,. "Donkey," though, of course, if I gave it a minute's thought I'd have to say, "Willie" or "Mr. Stringer." In any case, I'd have to explain my answer and when you start explaining things to psychologists you're in real trouble, as everyone knows.

The point is that depression always means The Depression to me, and in southern Africa at that time donkeys were selling at half-a-crown each. I don't know why I should remember that, because I was only a boy at the time and my father didn't have a donkey on the farm, but it's one of those things that stick. In fact, after a few years of drought he didn't have anything else on the farm either: the sheep and cattle had been sold, the chickens had been eaten and even his herd of tame springbok which used to come round the house and feed out of his hand had been slaughtered and sent to the hotels of Cape Town and Johannesburg, where people were still able to afford venison. I think that hurt him most of all.

And so one day, when he had grown tired of watching the dusty top soil blow away on the hot, dry winds, he loaded my mother and me into the Hupmobile and took us off to Aunt Alice's.

My Aunt Alice owned a boarding-house on the coast, near the mouth of the Green River and we spent all our holidays

We could see he had hooked a giant cob, the great-grandfather of all the other ones we had taken earlier

there. My father was a keen fisherman and so was I. Normally we were all pretty excited about going to Aunt Alice's but this time it was different; you could tell my mother was feeling strain and sadness. Though I didn't know it, going to Aunt Alice's really meant we were accepting charity.

So we got into the old Hupmobile, with the canvas water bottle hanging in front and our things on the roof, and drove away, and we couldn't even see the farmhouse for the dust on the road.

I was going on twelve at the time and I was about to become a professional fisherman.

I don't know if boarding-houses like my Aunt Alice's exist any longer; perhaps they're not sophisticated enough. It was a big ramshackle place with an upstairs balcony that ran round three sides. It stood by itself right on the edge of the beach and there wasn't another house for ten miles on either side. It was the sort of place where the bathwater—when there was any—ran rusty and where no-one wore shoes and socks. Everywhere you looked there were fishing rods. Aunt Alice catered mostly for farmers and when farmers came to the coast they wanted to eat fish. In those days there were very few country towns that ran to a fish shop, and if you wanted to see what a diet of mutton did to my father you only had to watch him pack away three grilled shad for breakfast.

Since there weren't any villages with proper fishing boats on that wild part of the coast, boarding-houses used to employ their own fishermen. You got food and a room and you fished all day for the hotel. That's what happened to us; my father and I became Aunt Alice's fishermen.

She gave us one of the small thatched bungalows near the main house and we fished fourteen hours a day, seven days a week. We were up before first light and we fished until it was so dark we could no longer see the rocks. There were even times when we took the fish spears and the lantern and went out into the shallows at night, hoping to get mullet. We fished in rain and cold and blinding sunshine and wind, and I've never felt quite the same about fishing since. I suppose it's different when you're doing something for a living.

There were three types of fishing available: boat fishing in the estuary, rock fishing and surf fishing. And sometimes on bad days we'd try all three.

You'd have thought my father would have been happy

just fishing all day, with no worries about rain or crops or anything, but he wasn't. After a few months he got a sort of withdrawn look about the eyes, and on days when the fishing was bad he'd get desperate to catch something, and then, perversely, when the fish were almost jumping on to the hook he'd shake his head and say, "This is a fine thing for a grown man." He didn't seem to be able to make up his mind one way or the other.

The same went for my mother. I remember one day when she suddenly turned on me and said, without cause, "It's time you had a bath, young man, and got your hair cut and put on a pair of shoes and socks for a change."

I tried to point out that nothing cleaned as well as sea water and that long hair protected me from the sun—which she was always going on about—but it didn't help much.

"George," she said to my father. "Will you light the boiler?"

My father went and got some wood and lit the boiler in the outside bathroom that served all the bungalows, and they both scrubbed at me as though their lives depended on it. What with the summer heat and the boiler going, the whole place was like a furnace. I tried to tell them that too much washing destroyed the natural oils in the skin but they just scrubbed harder. And then my mother cut my hair and made me put on my Sunday clothes right down to shoes and socks and you'd have thought she'd have been happy at last. Well, she wasn't. She stood there looking at me for a long time and then she put her arms round me and began to cry.

There was a queer look on my father's face too, and when my mother said, "George, we've got to get him away from here," he just nodded and turned away.

But of course there wasn't any other place to go; I understand that now.

You see the really sad thing was that while we were fishing as hard as we could, there wasn't any real reason to. The boarding-house was empty. This was something my father and I never talked about. If we had a good day we'd take the fish back to the kitchen and my father would say, "Well, here you are, Alice, here's the ration," in a sort of hearty voice, and if we'd had a bad day he'd say the wind was wrong or the temperature was wrong or the moon was too full or it wasn't full enough. I don't think I'd ever heard my father make excuses before. And then he'd go out to the beach and stare at the tents and after a while he'd go to bed.

I haven't told you about the tents. There must have been about fifty or sixty families living along the beach on either side of the boarding-house, not bunched together, but strung out over miles of sand—each family on its own few acres of dune. That's where we would have been living if it wasn't for Aunt Alice. Most of them were farmers like ourselves. The women spent the day collecting mussels and periwinkles and crabs—while the men fished for the pot.

Anyway, my Aunt Alice felt sorry for them and that's where the extra fish went. "Don't let your father see you," she'd say, as she packed a basket with half a dozen good-sized cob. If he knew, he didn't say anything. Most evenings now he sat with his ear to the battery wireless, listening to the weather forecasts. There still hadn't been a drop of rain in our area.

Giving out the fish had its funny side. The farmers were as proud and touchy as anything and you could see the word "charity" would have had them reaching for their shotguns. I had to make up long stories about how the fish would just go rotten if no-one ate it, which was true, and let them see they were helping us out since we'd all die of gas-poisoning if they didn't. But then the trouble was that when *they* had good catches they used to bring extra fish to the hotel to repay *us*.

It was while I was delivering fish one day that I met Willie. I'd seen him, of course, but I'd never spoken to him. He and his family lived in a camp about half a mile up the beach, just an old tarpaulin, really, tied to the back of a truck. Luckily for them it didn't rain much. Thinking back on it, they were about the poorest people I'd met up till then and I was at an age when I was beginning to discover the difference between rich and poor.

It was a bit embarrassing, because his father and mother sort of dry-washed their hands and I remember his father was crumpling up his hat, and saying thank you. "Tell your aunt we really appreciate this," he said. Then he turned and said, "Say thank you, Willie," and Willie just stood there looking at me.

I suppose he was about my age, or perhaps a year older, with sandy hair and light blue eyes that sort of fixed you to the spot while he inspected you and then gave you the impression that he didn't find much to be enthusiastic about. He was wearing a torn khaki shirt and shorts and I remember

he had the most beautiful feet—hard and leathery; the sort of feet I'd have had if I hadn't had to wear shoes.

Well, we just stood there. I mean I didn't *want* his thanks, but I couldn't very well walk away.

At last he said, "Why can't *we* fish in the river?"

"Willie!" It was the sort of explosive sound my mother made and I knew he'd probably get the strap later.

My aunt owned both banks of the river and the estuary was reserved for guests at the boarding-house. It was just about the best fishing place there was and she was keeping it that way, because she'd still have to make her living when we had all gone. At first some of the farmers had resented her rights, but then after she began giving them fish they didn't mind so much.

"You could fish there with me," I said.

And that's how I got to know Willie.

I suppose you could say that meeting Willie gave me my first inklings of class structure. The point was that he walked barefoot because he didn't have a pair of shoes; I walked that way from choice. His father had been a foreman on a farm; my father owned one, or at least he and the bank owned it together. And even though neither family had two pounds to rub together, we were the employers, they the employed. I had a feeling sometimes that Willie both envied me and despised me and I didn't like it very much.

Anyway, Willie came fishing with us two or three times a week, and on days when we'd made our catch early, we'd go swimming together or exploring the banks of the river or just lie up behind the dunes reading. I used to read a lot of Seamark and Henty in those days; Willie was already reading Tomlinson.

It was a strange sort of relationship because I suppose if there was a leader between the two of us, it was Willie and yet he never said anything very much. Even when my father was with us it was Willie who quietly suggested shifting anchorage, Willie who was up before dawn digging for bait, Willie who could unravel an overwind without losing his temper. It was a pleasure to watch his long tapering fingers working with the green Cuttyhunk. "He's got surgeon's hands," my father once said.

The more we fished, the more we got used to each other, and a time came when Willie seemed to drop the barriers slightly, even so far as to smile once in a while. But then at nightfall, when we came in from the estuary, up would go

the shutters again, the fish would be scrupulously divided and off Willie would go across the dunes to his camp.

Well, things went on like this for several months and then two things happened: we heard about the fishing competition and Mr. Stringer arrived.

Mr. Stringer was the first real guest my Aunt Alice had had since we arrived, and you could tell how important that was to her. He came every year for the fishing but no-one was certain he was coming this year; what with The Depression and all. And then she got a letter confirming his booking and she turned the whole house upside-down, cleaning and polishing; you'd have thought royalty was coming. In a way, anyone with enough money for a holiday *was* royalty.

To me, Mr. Stringer was better than any royalty I'd ever heard of; you could just see straightaway that there wasn't a king anywhere that had better fishing tackle than Mr. Stringer. I mean, he had *two* boat rods, a spinning rod, two sea poles—all new and shiny—a stainless-steel gaff, beautiful teak centre-pin reels, dark with linseed oil, a canvas bag with compartments for swivels, hooks, traces, sinkers, pliers, scissors... everything. It was a pleasure just to look at that tackle.

And Mr. Stringer matched it. He was big and handsome with blue-black hair sleeked down over his head and a high-bridged nose that gave him a haughty look. His clothes were expensive and his car was new. Beside him my father looked like—I was going to say poor white, except I hadn't heard the phrase then.

Mr. Stringer had been left a fortune by his father, who had founded a chain of laundries in Johannesburg, and he had spent his time travelling about the world fishing. Once he had even gone to Wedgeport, Nova Scotia, for the tuna. I knew then what I wanted to be when I grew up; I wanted to be Mr. Stringer.

One evening after supper he said, "You can carry my bag if you like."

"You mean go with you?"

He smiled down at me. "What do you think?"

He made carrying his bag sound like some sort of honour and I went down to the beach and watched him spin for shad. Just to see him cast a spinner was an education. After a while I noticed Willie standing on the edge of the dunes. I'd arranged to go digging prawns with him but I pretended not to see him and in a little while he left.

"Who was that?" Mr. Stringer said, after he'd gone.

"Just one of the campers."

"There are too damn many here for my liking."

Mr. Stringer had brought his own boat, so now there were two on the estuary. It was a funny thing, but just about the time he arrived the fish stopped biting. Days went by now without us landing anything and my father's face became thinner and more lined. Hour after hour the two boats would follow the edge of the tide as it crept up the estuary and then turn with it and begin the slow drift down again. We caught nothing but the odd grunter.

It even began to affect Willie. He'd never mentioned that evening on the beach, but one afternoon, after we'd been fishing without luck since dawn, he nodded over to Mr. Stringer's boat and said, "Fancy tackle doesn't make a fancy fisherman."

My father sort of smiled to himself and I kept my mouth shut. Willie was jealous.

But Willie was really only giving expression to the feelings of worry we were all experiencing. It was bad enough for my father, coming back empty-handed in the evenings, but at least Aunt Alice had a well-stocked larder. With Willie it was different. Already they were reduced to eating tasteless ground maize called samp. Strangely, the worry affected Mr. Stringer most of all—you'd have thought there was something personal about the fish not biting.

Well, anyway, in the middle of this lean period we read about the fishing competition. It was organised by a national magazine and the first prize was a hundred pounds. Anyone could enter and the prize would go to the biggest fish taken on rod and line—barring sharks—during the following fortnight. You had to send in a witnessed statement attesting to weight, and a photograph of yourself with the fish. No-one could remember what a hundred pounds was like, so you can imagine the effect—and it was just our rotten luck that all the fish seemed to have left our section of the coast. Still, it gave us the impetus to fish all the harder even though the weather was blinding hot.

For five days we didn't touch a fish, not even a nibble. It was said the cob had left the estuary after a shoal of herring but that was just one more excuse laid on top of a lot of others. On the sixth day, Mr. Stringer caught a small bream of about three pounds and since it wasn't nearly big enough to feed us at the boarding-house Aunt Alice gave it to Willie

and Mr. Stringer saw her. It mightn't have been so bad if it had been one of ours, but as I've said there seemed something personal in Mr. Stringer's fishing. His face went a sort of mottled colour and he said to Aunt Alice, "It seems you're running a bread-line for poor whites!"

You could have heard a leaf fall. Willie stopped, as though he'd been stung, then very carefully he placed the fish on the dining-room table and walked stiffly out of the room.

We all stood there like statues until, finally, my father broke the silence. "You'd do well to remember, Stringer," he said, "that with one possible exception we're all poor whites."

Later, when I asked him what poor whites meant, he said there were different types of poverty, but poverty of feeling was the worst. That was a real stumper until I realised he was meaning Mr. Stringer.

I'd like to be able to say that my opinion of Mr. Stringer changed when he insulted Willie, but I can't. The only excuse I can offer is that at that age I was terrified of being made to look a fool. In my half-baked hero worship Mr. Stringer could do no wrong; therefore Willie was at fault.

So the next morning I was relieved when Willie didn't show up. My father was getting the rods and bait into the boat and I was helping with the oars when he said, "Where's Willie? He's not usually late."

"Perhaps he's not coming," I muttered, hoping it would be left like that because Mr. Stringer had just arrived.

My father looked hard at me. "Fetch him!"

You don't argue with my father when he uses that tone, so I went off to Willie's camp, but no-one was there so I went back and we started fishing. It was one of those really fierce days in the middle of summer and the glare on the estuary seemed to scorch the eyeballs.

I suppose we'd been fishing for about three hours before we got our first bite. It was on one of my father's rods and soon he had a small cob flapping in the bottom of the boat. It wasn't much but it was something, specially since almost as soon as he'd rebaited he caught another. Then I caught one. We began to get excited.

"They've come back," my father said, boating one of about fifteen pounds. "They're back in the river, boy!"

And they were. We moved up on the edge of the tide and caught ten more in the next hour, all good-sized fish.

"This is it!" my father said. "We're in!"

Mr. Stringer's boat was about four hundred yards abeam

of us and I could see the flash of silver every now and then as he boated one of his own. He waved and held one up for us to see and I held up two of ours. Then I saw Willie. He was fishing from the end of an old broken jetty. I think Mr. Stringer must have seen him about the same time, because I saw his arm waving again. But this time it meant *clear off*.

Willie just ignored him and went on fishing, and then all of a sudden I saw his rod-tip whip down and bend almost double as he struck and I knew he was onto a big one.

We watched him play the fish for about fifteen minutes before my father said, "He'll never land him from the jetty. It's too high. Give me an oar." We began to row towards the far bank. "Get the gaff ready!"

When we came within earshot my father shouted, "Work him over this way. I'll gaff him for you."

But Willie didn't want our help. He backed off down the jetty giving out a bit of slack and then he jumped down on to a small spit of sand and you could see he was going to try to beach the fish by himself. I suppose he didn't want anyone to get in between him and that hundred pounds.

"Don't be a fool," my father shouted. "You'll lose him!"

Willie paid no attention. He must have been fighting that fish for more than half an hour.

My father sat rock-still, watching. He kept on muttering "Easy . . . easy . . ." under his breath.

We could see that Willie had hooked a giant cob, the great-grandfather of the ones we'd taken earlier. Now, as he brought it to within a few yards of the sand-pit, it was belly-up and almost dead of exhaustion.

Then it must have spotted him. He was just bending down to take the leader in his hands when the fish gave one last flurry with its tail. It sort of slapped down on the water and I saw Willie's rod jerk straight.

"He's lost it!" my father groaned.

It was true. Although the fish was almost dead it was now floating away on the ebbing tide.

"Quick!" my father said. "Get a spinner on." I knew what he was thinking. If we could cast a spinner over the cob we might be able to foul-hook him.

I tore open the fishing-bag but everything was tangled up in a mess; not like Mr. Stringer's outfit.

"Hurry up!"

I could see everything except a spinner: hooks, sinkers, traces, wire, swivels, bits of line . . . Then I heard my father

draw in his breath sharply. I looked up to see Mr. Stringer cast a spinner in a beautiful parabola. It dropped about eight feet beyond the floating cob. He brought it back gently until it almost reached the fish and then he jerked slightly. His line straightened, his rod-tip bent, and then he struck, sinking the hooks into flesh.

"Well done!" my father shouted. "Beautiful!"

Looking back on it, I feel sure I must have felt a sudden apprehension at that moment, though I can't really remember. All I seem able to recall is the figure of Willie standing next to the jetty. He was utterly bereft.

"I can't believe it," my father said, and his voice was as hard as flint. "I simply can't believe you'd do a thing like that, Stringer."

"I don't care. It's none of your damn business anyway."

Well it *was* our business in a sense, since we'd helped him boat the fish and bring it back to Aunt Alice's. I know my father would have cut the line if he thought for a second Mr. Stringer was going to claim it as his. And for that matter, so would I. I was beginning to see Mr. Stringer in a new light and I didn't like what I saw; nor did I like the feeling of shame that seemed to have settled on my chest. Only the sight of the fish kept me from dwelling too much on my own problems. It was a monster. It must have been over five feet long and weighed perhaps a hundred and fifty pounds. We didn't know what it really weighed because it had broken Aunt Alice's fish scale.

"Look here, Stringer," my father said in a milder tone, "be reasonable. Even if you did finally hook it, it was Willie who killed it for you. For God's sake, man, you don't need the money! Think what it'll do for the boy and his family." There was no doubt in any of our minds that we had the competition winner right there in the kitchen.

But Mr. Stringer wasn't having any. "That's my fish," he said. It was the final statement and it was made in that sort of throaty tone that I've since come to associate with greed.

"All right. Have it your way, but I'm telling you there's not one of us here who'll attest its weight."

Mr. Stringer looked down at my father with a sort of sneer on his lips. "I've already taken care of that. There'll be a reporter and photographer here from the local paper tomorrow morning. They'll bring a scale and do all that's needed." He turned to Aunt Alice who'd been watching him with

hostile eyes. "It'll have to go into your icebox, Mrs. Grant."

"Its tail would scarcely fit into my icebox—and then you'd have to cut it off."

"No-one's cutting this fish," he said flatly. "It'll have lost enough weight by evaporation before morning."

"Well you can't leave it in the house." She pressed her lips firmly together. "You can put it in the outside bathroom and wrap it in wet sacks. That's the best I can offer."

He dragged the fish out and none of us raised a finger to help him.

"Come on," my father said to me, and we walked across the beach to Willie's camp. We didn't do much there, just sat and had coffee with them. We didn't talk about the fish at all. I don't know whether Willie was happier because we'd come or not—but I was.

I couldn't sleep that night for the heat. I lay between damp sheets listening to the mosquitoes and tried to work out the first real human tangle I'd ever experienced.

And then, about midnight, I heard my father get up and start banging into things and my mother's voice asking what on earth was wrong and then he said something which I couldn't hear and my mother said, "A bath! At this time of night! George, have you taken leave of your senses?"

Well, it was a pretty drastic thing to be doing, so you could tell how upset my father was. He must have been gone about two hours and when he came back I heard him saying in a bright, chirpy voice how much he'd enjoyed his bath and that people should bathe more often—that he'd really stoked the fire up well so there'd be enough hot water for my mother to have a bath in the morning. It was the strangest sort of talk I'd ever heard, especially since the last time there'd been any hot water was when they'd bathed me. Water was short here too, you see.

But he was right, because when I tried the hot-water tap in the bungalow the next morning it ran out near boiling.

I'd woken late so I didn't wash too thoroughly and I ran up towards the house for breakfast. When I was passing the back of the bathroom I caught the whiff. It was faint at first but as I got closer it strengthened up marvellously. It was a queasy, sickening sort of smell that red-bait gets if you leave it out in the sun. I was just about to turn the corner when I heard raised voices—Mr. Stringer's and two others I didn't know. The strangers were outside the door, one with a camera and the other with a notebook.

Mr. Stringer was just about to open the door and he was saying in a testy voice, "Of course it's all right. Any fish is going to smell a bit in this weather."

I'd have to be a poet to describe the stinking blast of hot air that came rushing out of that bathroom when he finally opened the door. It was simply beautiful.

"My God!" Mr. Stringer shouted in anguish. "Save my fish!"

We all crowded in after him. The sacks he'd wrapped the fish in were crackling dry except in patches where some dark, gooey fluid was staining them. It's simply astounding what hot weather can do to a dead fish.

"Over-ripe, I'd judge," said my father, coming in after us. "You can never tell in this weather."

"A bath," Mr. Stringer was shouting. "Someone . . . *you*!" He pointed a quivering finger at my father. "You lit the boiler!"

"Even poor whites must wash occasionally," my father replied, with dignity. I hadn't seen him looking so chipper for a long time.

Mr. Stringer stared at him and you could see he was wondering if he could get away with justifiable homicide. "I'll make you pay for this," he said.

"I doubt it."

Anyway that was about the end of it. When they tried to pick the fish up to weigh it, the head broke off. Then they tried to stick it back for a photograph and the dorsal fin tore away and then its belly burst open, so finally they had to bury it near the dustbins. In a way it was a pity, because it just might have been a world record or something.

Mr. Stringer left that afternoon and we followed him two days later when the news came through that nearly six inches of rain had fallen in our area.

We were all in a state of euphoria when we were packing up. Willie and his father were to fish for the hotel and then when we'd got the farm going again they'd come to us and his father would be foreman and Willie would go to school with me.

There was so much optimism and happiness that everything seemed possible.

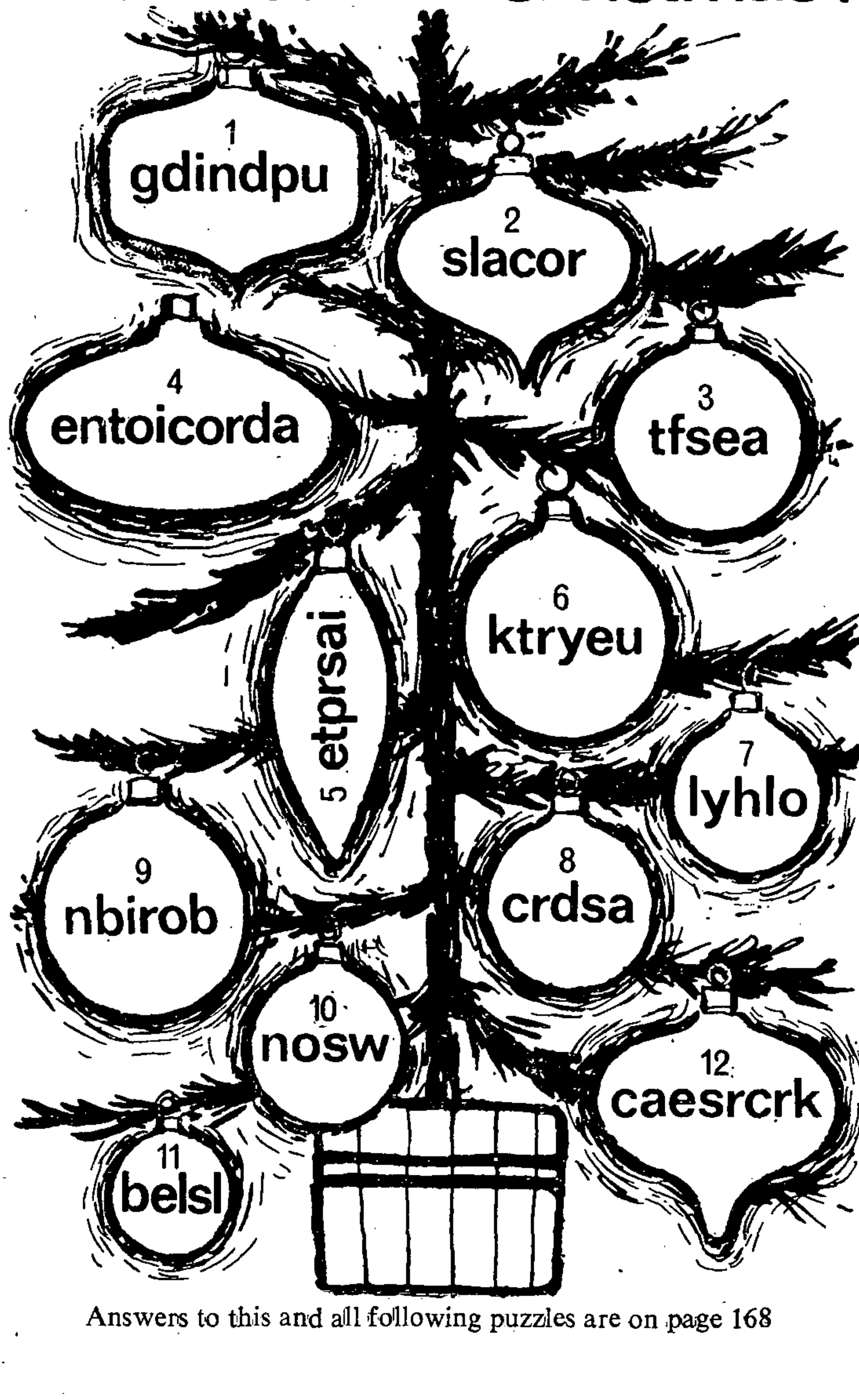
But we never did get rich overnight, and what with payments to the bank there wasn't enough money to hire a foreman. So I never did see Willie again . . .

© Alan Scholefield 1965

Christmas Crackers

12 page supplement of puzzles features and fun for the whole family

Can you find 12 things associated with Christmas?



Answers to this and all following puzzles are on page 168

How well do you remember 1965?

1. Which news event had the widest coverage?

2. Which horse won the Derby?

3. Which dress designer has made the greatest international impact?

4. Britain's tallest building was officially opened on October 8th. What is it?

5. In which month did Labour come to power?

6. Which world-famous actress returned to the English stage after a ten-year absence?

7. Name the Englishman who made the Atlantic crossing in the smallest boat ever—*Sea Egg*.

8. Which distinguished doctor died?

9. What breed of dog was voted Supreme Champion of this year's Cruft's Dog Show?

10. How many Royal babies were born in 1965?

11. What anniversary did Sir Malcolm Sargent celebrate?

12. Which team won the FA cup?

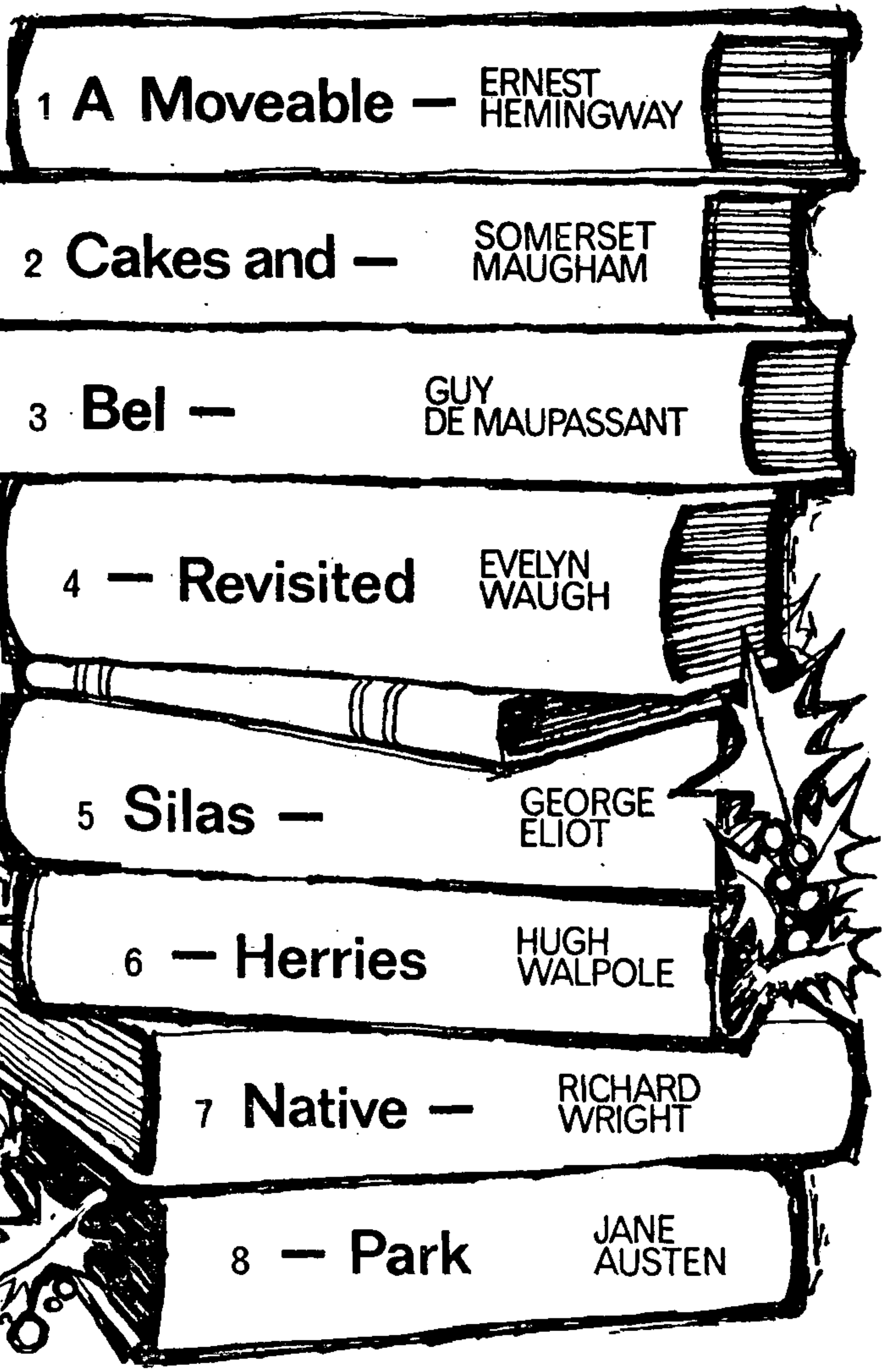
13. Which writer has walked the corridors of power in 1965?

14. Can you think of something that actually became free of charge this year?

15. Which first class cricketer scored the most runs?

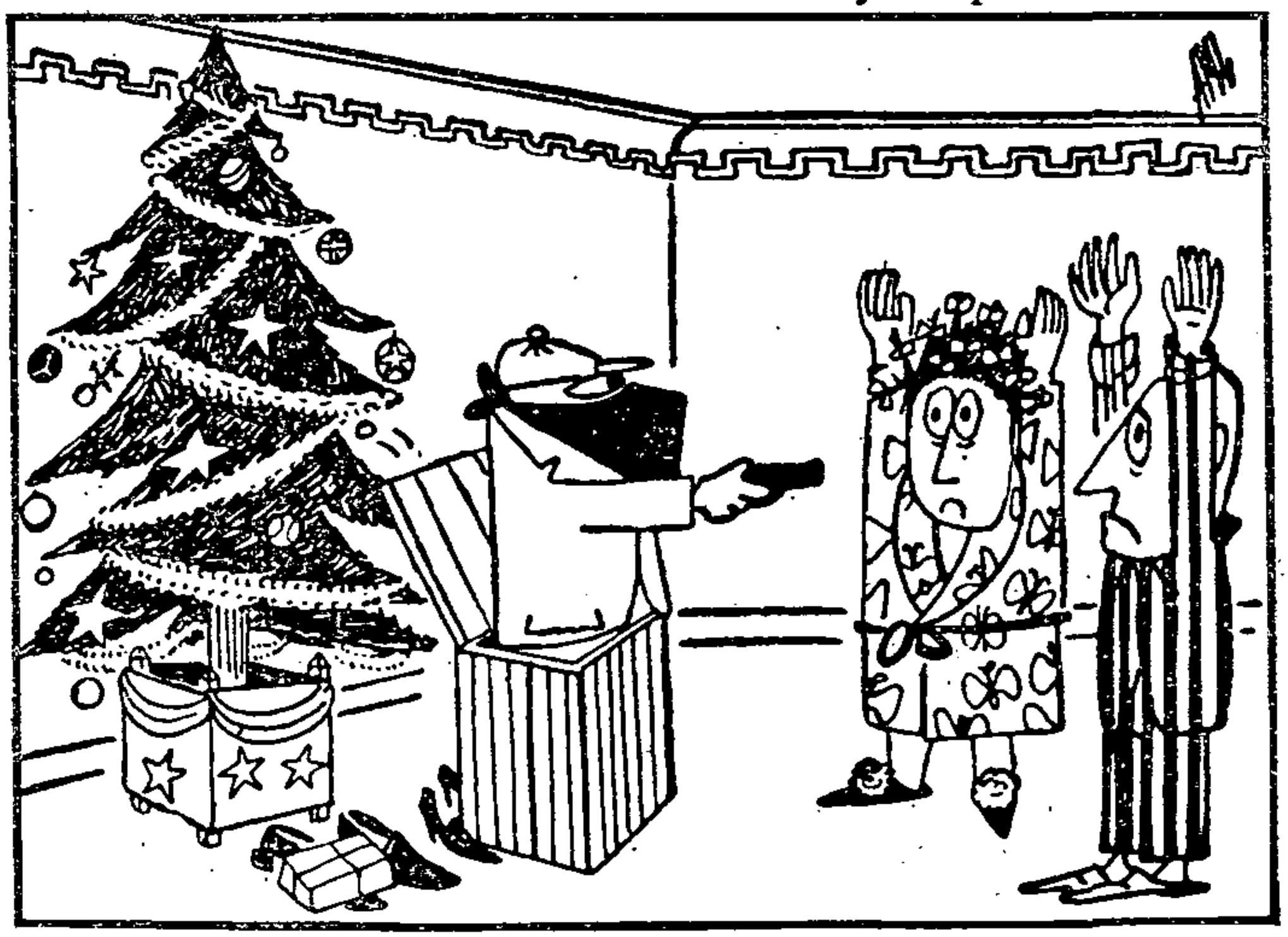
16. Where did the most spectacular public orgy of 1965 take place?

Can you complete 8 the titles of these 8 books?


1 A Moveable — ERNEST HEMINGWAY
2 Cakes and — SOMERSET MAUGHAM
3 Bel — GUY DE MAUPASSANT
4 — Revisited EVELYN WAUGH
5 Silas — GEORGE ELIOT
6 — Herries HUGH WALPOLE
7 Native — RICHARD WRIGHT
8 — Park JANE AUSTEN

What's the difference?

Have a good look at the above drawing. Then compare with it the one below, in which the artist has made seven subtle alterations. Can you spot them?



Who is he?

1. He is not English.
2. He's written books galore.
3. He is titled.

If you still can't see it, join up the numbers below.

THE MISSING WORD

Any dictionary of quotations would be sadly lacking if it didn't include the following. You may think you know them all; but can you put your finger right on every missing word?

1. 'T was the night before Christmas, when all through
   the house
   Not a creature was ——, not even a mouse
   CLEMENT C. MOORE

2. "I polished up that handle so carefullee
   That now I am the —— of the Queen's Navee!"
   W. S. GILBERT, *HMS Pinafore*

3. Marriage is popular because it combines the maximum of
   temptation with the —— of opportunity
   G. B. SHAW, *Maxims for Revolutionists*

4. "I feel no pain dear Mother now
   But oh, I am so dry!
   O take me to a ——
   And leave me there to die"
   C. FOX-SMITH, *Book of Shanties*

5. "God bless us every one!" said —— Tim, the last of all
   CHARLES DICKENS, *A Christmas Carol*

6. The Owl and the Pussycat went to sea
   In a beautiful —— boat
   EDWARD LEAR, *The Owl and the Pussycat*

7. "I know I have the body of a weak and —— woman, but
   I have the heart and stomach of a king"
   QUEEN ELIZABETH I, *Speech to Troops at Tilbury*

8. Quinquireme of Nineveh from distant Ophir
   Rowing home to —— in sunny Palestine
   JOHN MASEFIELD, *Cargoes*

9. 'T was ——, and the slithy toves
   Did gyre and gimble in the wabe
   LEWIS CARROLL, *Jabberwocky*

10. Christmas is coming, the —— are getting fat,
    Please to put a penny in the old man's hat
    Beggar's Rhyme

Cheers!

or, A Word in Your Ear

Pre-Christmas Technique

Recently we have been devoting more time to what we call Counter-Christmassing. In this, the expert prepares his life-field by taking the Christmas out of Christmas for other people ...Coad-Sanderson has always been my model here. He was in advertising, and to be in advertising is to be naturally one up on everything except perhaps advertising itself. Round about the beginning of December, when we began to get a bit warmed up and prospective about Christmas and started mentioning it, he would say: "Well, thank God that's over."

"How do you mean?" we would say.

"Well, of course, this Christmas started for me in February."

"How February?"

"Frightful flare-up deciding on an entirely new layout for Shortt and Weitz's street level window-display. As you can imagine, our client is on the conservative side. A tremendous robin-and-mistletoe man, but it wasn't until March that I convinced him that festooning them with holly wasn't the best way to sell ladies' girdles..."

Coad made really an extremely good story of these Christmas advertising meetings, but of course it had a very sapping effect on the thrill of holly and mistletoe.

STEPHEN POTTER, *Supermanship*

Too Much

Glorious time of great too much!
Too much heat and too much noise,
Too much babblement of boys,
Too much eating, too much drinking,
Too much everything but thinking.

LEIGH HUNT, *Christmas*

Lumbered

The news is that in a large San Francisco store Father Christmas has been lumbered with a wife. A determined-looking matron, dressed in spangles and a bustle, now stalks the aisles. She is none other than Mrs. Santa Claus, and by the sound of her advance publicity she is here to stay.

"This Mrs. Santa Claus thing," says an official of the store, "is going to grow and grow. The idea is that Mrs. Santa Claus gets tired of staying up there in the North Pole. After all, Santa Claus is gone every Christmas, so she gets fed up. She decides to come with him. Well, you can imagine all the new avenues this opens up for us . . ."

PATRICK CAMPBELL, *Constantly in Pursuit*

April Yule, Daddy!

Roses are things which Christmas is not
a bed of them,
Because it is the day when parents finally
realise that their children will always
be a jump ahead of them.
You stay up all night trimming the tree
into a veritable fairyland and then in the
joyous morn you spring it on the children
in a blaze of glory, and who says Ooh!?
You.

OGDEN NASH

Pure Love

Another Christmas reform impends . . . For some time past experiments have been proceeding with a new automatic antiseptic mistletoe. The leaves are of sterilised green satin and the berries are made of indurated milk. It will function on the principle of the automatic sprinkler, in this manner: two kissers approach the mistletoe in a spirit of holiday lust. As they square off under the mistletoe the heat generated by their fondness for each other releases hundreds of tiny sprinklers concealed in the mistletoe "berries" and a spray of healing formaldehyde sifts gently down upon them like a benison, destroying all coryza, *grippe*, influenza, pneumonia, or tetanus germs that may be lurking about the kissers' kissers.

FRANK SULLIVAN, *The Christmas of the Future*

Old English Revels

On Christmas evening we were supposed to be specially festive in the Old English fashion. The hall was horribly draughty, but it seemed to be the proper place to revel in, and it was decorated with Japanese fans and Chinese lanterns which gave it a very Old English effect. A young lady with a confidential voice favoured us with a long recitation about a little girl who died or did something equally hackneyed, and then the Major gave us a graphic account of a struggle he had with a wounded bear. I privately wished that the bears would win sometimes on these occasions; at least they wouldn't go vapouring about it afterwards... As a crowning dissipation, they all sat down to play progressive halma, with milk-chocolate for prizes. I've been carefully brought up, and I don't like to play games of skill for milk-chocolate, so I invented a headache and retired from the scene.

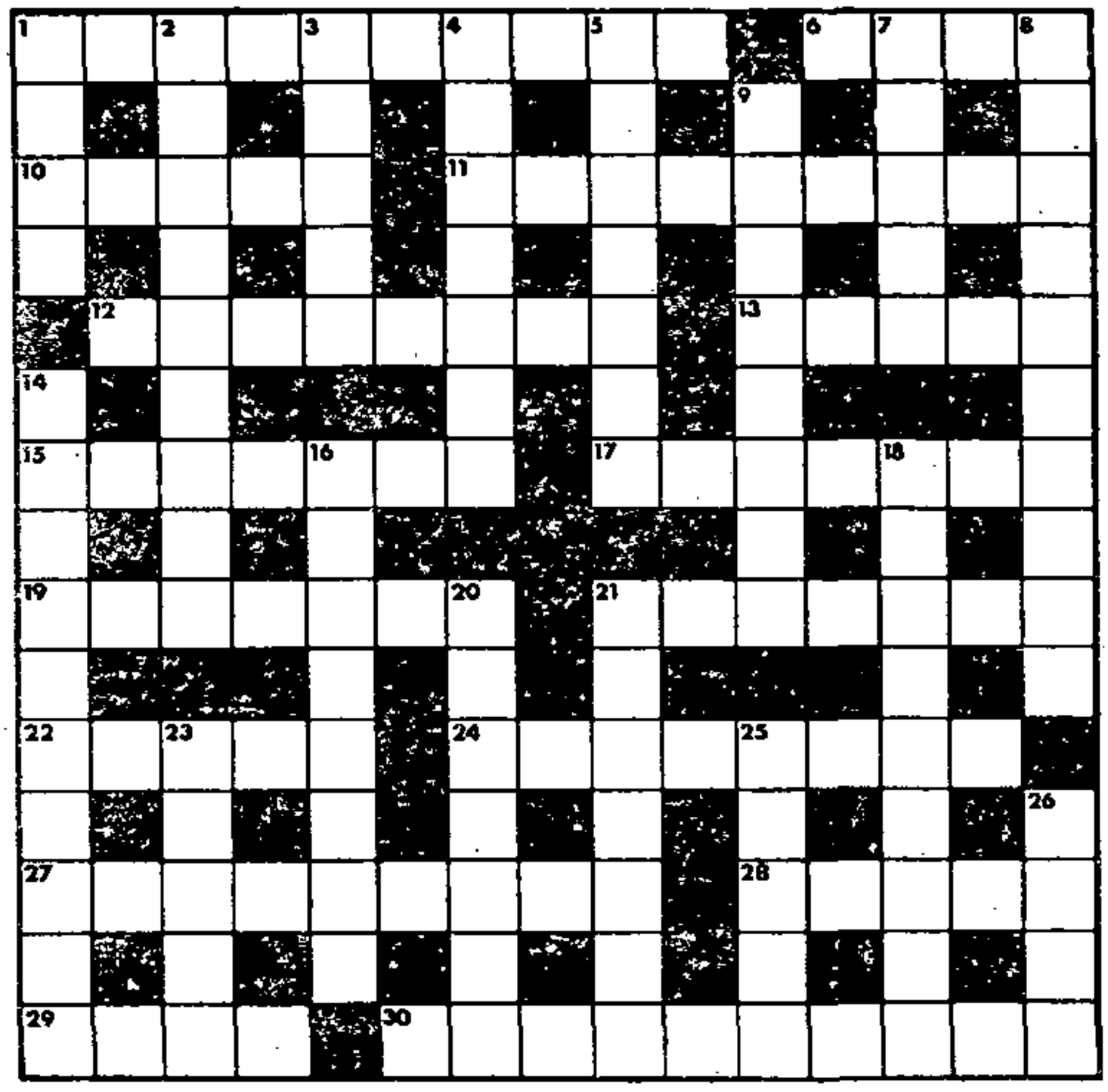
SAKI, *Reginald's Christmas*

Good Investment

'Most all the time, the whole year round,
there ain't no flies on me,
But jest 'fore Christmas I'm as good as
I kin be!

EUGENE FIELD, *Jest 'Fore Christmas*

ARGOSY CHRISTMAS CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1 He's highly diplomatic (10).

6 This mincepie of mine's mixed in the heroic style! (4).

10 Loves to play detective? (5).

11 The Christmas tree always starts off this way! (9).

12 Onion shoot goes round everything (8).

13 "Fools are my ——, let satire be my song" (Byron) (5).

15 Be chary and avoid complete confusion (7).

17 Pole being negative? (7).

19 Santa Claus would find one useful—and be in the picture! (7).

21 Leader of Irish Home Rule Party in 1885 (7).

22 Fruit of Antigua varied? (5).

24 Stay with them, precious (8).

27 11 for kissing couples (9).

28 Magnificent Elgar variation? (5).

29 With two runners, you can surely put a bob on! (4).

30 Should come into one's reckoning (10).

DOWN

1 This ran, too! (4).

2 Battle helmet (9).

3 What charming words! (5).

4 Pleasantness is any time (7).

5 Like a lot of water? (7).

7 Played at a party (5).

8 Slag girl has to clock out! (10).

9 Always stirring up trouble, you are (8).

14 Seasonal political tricks? (5, 5).

16 You escape bull — turned out he's blameworthy (8).

18 Failure to notice — or can't see (9).

20 Boar for barbecue? (7).

21 Not to be given in future? (7).

23 Even at Christmas the bride trips down here (5).

25 This collection of women would be a gift to some men! (5).

26 There's a sterling one, for instance (4).

MOVIE TIME QUIZ

1. Name the film written by John Osborne in which Laurence Olivier played the lead.
2. Which actress rocketed to success after a tiny part in *All About Eve*?
3. Who composed the music for *West Side Story*?
4. Which American comedian played the part of Walter Mitty?
5. Give the title of the English film that brought international stardom to Simone Signoret.
6. Who directed the famous musical *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*?
7. Name the female star of *Jules et Jim*.
8. Who played the title role in *Citizen Kane*?
9. How many Marx brothers were there—and what were their professional Christian names?
10. Name the English director of *The Bridge on the River Kwai*.
11. In which recent film does Peter Sellers play a psychiatrist?
12. Which German actress became famous after appearing in *Blue Angel*?
13. Who were the two male stars of *Becket*?
14. Who composed the theme music for *Dangerous Moonlight* and what was it called?
15. Name the female star of *Topkapi*.
16. Which game is featured in *The Hustler*?
17. In *Ship of Fools*, who plays the ship's doctor—and what nationality is this actor?

Please turn to page 168 for the answers

A NOTABLE FRENCH SATIRIST TAKES —

A Sour Look at Cinderella*

by JEAN DUTOURD

ONCE upon a time there was a little girl who looked like a lot of other little girls. She had an average nose, an average mouth, an oval face, twenty-eight nice white teeth (her wisdom teeth hadn't come in yet), blue eyes and brown hair. Her parents didn't love her very much. Why? Well, it's hard to say. Who knows why one loves? The antipathy of M. and Mme. Perrault for their daughter Cinderella was not at all the kind that mediocre people feel for superior individuals, because the child was superior in nothing. She read novels by the Countess de Ségur; she got average marks at school; she played pieces by Clementi on the piano; she cherished an old bald doll; and she was crazy about hamburgers.

Besides Cinderella (whose real name was Monique), M. and Mme. Perrault had two other daughters—Artemise and Cunegonde; proud young women, pretty and haughty, who played the most outrageous tricks on them and whom they led around with a ring in their noses. Here we put a finger on an essential aspect of human relations: Artemise and Cunegonde had a stronger will than their parents; as a result, they lorded it over them. M. and Mme. Perrault had a stronger will than little Monique; as a result, the latter was practically everybody's servant, including the maid's, who was for ever sending her to get bread or summoning her to make the beds. Contrariwise, Artemise and Cunegonde, who were dirty, lazy and

insolent, were waited on like princesses. Monique had the best nature in the world, but nobody was grateful to her for it. But when her sisters, by chance, deigned to smile, the whole house went into ecstasies over their natural charm. As is bound to happen, these two damsels were in league against Monique. They bedevilled her all day long by poking fun at her, making her the butt of practical jokes and false accusations that brought down on the unfortunate girl's head innumerable scoldings and a train of punishment.

Habit is a terrible thing. Cinderella did not realise that existence, for her, could be different from what it was. The idea would never have occurred to her that she was being treated with injustice. Her sweet disposition did not grow sour. She went for bread singing and made the beds happily. In short, she was a real little slave, a born slave. On occasion, she questioned herself about her condition and found herself extremely lucky to have good parents, who fed her, clothed her and had her taught to play the piano—for which she had no talent at all. She did not recoil before any baseness in order to conciliate the good will of the Mesdemoiselles Artemise and Cunegonde, whom she admired madly.

A day came when the three young girls were of an age to be married. Artemise and Cunegonde were very much courted; because they were pretty, because they dressed well, because they liked night clubs and because their parents were rich. Dapper phonies, students of political science or sons of industrialists, came to call for them in snow-white Italian cars and brought them home at four in the morning. As for Cinderella, she didn't go out. One evening, however, a mathematics student, bearded and smelling of tobacco, took her to the pictures. She had permission to stay out until midnight. The student, who didn't have a *sou*, made her take the subway. They attended a boring picture in an arty cinema way downtown. This young man, despite his pipe and beard, was timid. Although Monique was no uglier than the next girl and ardently wished to be made love to, he took her back to her home by the subway and restricted his attentions to those bounds.

Artemise married an attaché of the embassy, and Cunegonde became the wife of young Bonzini, of Bonzini Macaroni (a hundred million in turnover per year). Cinderella wept copiously at both ceremonies: with the sisters gone, the house was going to be very sad and very empty. M. and Mme.

Perrault explained to her gravely (but in a tone that left no room for argument) that they had made "a great financial sacrifice" in order to set their first two daughters up in a fitting manner and that there was nothing left, alas, for a dowry for the third one. The third one found this quite natural. She even felt a certain pride: her father told her, with a good-natured smile, that he did not "doubt her disinterestedness."

Cinderella had a godmother, a surly old witch, who gave her a little gift from time to time and whom she went to see on New Year's Day.

On one of these visits, the good woman said: "My dear child, you're going to be twenty-five years old soon. I have found you a Prince Charming. He is a little older than you, but he makes a good living. He is head of a department in the Ministry of Agriculture. Eventually he will become director, with an excellent pension."

Cinderella was not very intrigued, but she didn't dare say no. A meeting took place. The suitor was fifty-three years old, wore eyeglasses and had very set habits. He was a widower with three children. The marriage took place three months later.

Obviously, Cinderella was very unhappy. The head of the department was even more authoritarian than her parents. He had an old mistress, who was none other than his secretary at the ministry. He had married Cinderella only to get a free governess for his three children, who were abominable little monsters and whom it didn't take more than four years to lead their stepmother into the grave.

Translation © Doubleday & Co. Inc. 1965

Translated from the French by Grace T. Mayes

◆ Jean Dutourd is a sophisticated Frenchman who specialises in striking back at the fairy tales of his youth. He creates fables of his own that are meant to toughen souls with steel and paint the world in its true colours. In Dutourd's fables, the Cinderella rarely marries the Prince and the rich man is far happier than the cobbler. Dutourd lives in Paris with his wife and two children and is recognised also as a novelist and leading drama critic

A mysterious accident on Christmas Eve sends Mr. Calder and Mr. Behrens to Bonn to solve another security riddle in a new story, specially written for Argosy

DRAWING BY ROBB

Heilige Nacht

BY MICHAEL GILBERT

SQUADRON-LEADER LEOPOLD, late of the RAF, but now attached to the Foreign Office, took the early-morning flight from London Airport to Frankfurt on December 24th. This Christmas-Eve flight had been totally booked for several weeks, and Leopold had to use his priority rating to get a passage. Technically, this meant that he occupied the spare seat kept for such emergencies—the perquisite of the off-duty air hostess. In fact, he spent most of his time on the flight deck talking to the pilot, an old friend of his.

Leopold was carrying his operational passport, which was made out in the name of James Bellingham and described him as an insurance broker. His complete luggage was a flight bag into which he had thrust a few overnight necessities when he had received the emergency call at eleven o'clock the night before.

At Frankfurt he transferred himself and his bag into the small two-seater craft which was waiting for him and which landed him, in a heavy shower of sleet, at an old army airfield seven miles outside Bonn at eleven-thirty. Here he was met by Captain Massey, Military Attaché at the Embassy. Massey hurried Squadron-Leader Leopold straight out to the car, which he was driving himself, and started off with him down the little-used secondary road which joins the airfield to the city.

These facts were all established beyond reasonable doubt and on the evidence of reliable witnesses, in the inquiry which followed. What was less certain is exactly what happened next.

The car was spotted by a farm worker, at midday, upside-down in a drainage culvert. There were long, greasy skid-marks on the surface of the road and a gap had been torn in

the fence guarding the fifteen-foot vertical drop over the culvert.

The sergeant of police, who was on the scene within ten minutes, was an intelligent man. He spotted the diplomatic badge on the car and telephoned the Embassy to report that its two occupants had broken necks.

The First Secretary himself took the call. Martin Seccombe was a diplomat of the old school. He was not fond of the military attaché, nor had he approved of the undercover activities which seemed to be part of his job. Nevertheless, he had categorical instructions which came from too high up to be flouted and he knew precisely what steps had to be taken.

He therefore personally encoded and dispatched a message which was received in London at one o'clock and was passed immediately to D.I.6 with a copy to Mr. Fortescue, Controller of the External Branch of the Joint Services Standing Intelligence Committee.

At midday on that same day, Josef Bartz, a clerk in the dispatch section of the Bonn office of the Great Polish Electrical Combine, which was known throughout Eastern Europe simply as "PD" and was a world pioneer of electronic computers, closed his ledgers and locked them in his desk. The firm knocked off work at midday on Christmas Eve and it was customary, at this point, for the annual bonus to be handed out, with a personal good-will message to each of his workers from the head of the firm in Warsaw. It was gestures of this sort which inspired PD to describe themselves as "a happy family."

On this occasion the bonus was a large one, and the happy family atmosphere was particularly marked. Executives who had bought Christmas presents for their secretaries took this opportunity of presenting them personally; people called on friends in other departments; a sprig of mistletoe appeared over the door of the ladies' lavatory, and the whole interior of the PD building, which normally presented an appearance of smooth and decorous efficiency, bubbled over, for the space of a single hour, with life and high spirits.

Josef seemed to have a great many friends. He visited almost every department in the building.

One of these was in the basement and the notice on the door said *Head of Messengers*. A particularly riotous party was going on here and Josef was invited to join it. He was only in the room for five minutes, but during this time he managed,

unnoticed in the scrummage, to reach out with his foot and kick over a switch under the head messenger's desk.

When he left he took a lift straight up to the managerial floor and made for the office of the Communications Manager. He knocked on the door and receiving no answer looked into the room and found it empty. This can hardly have been a surprise to him since he had watched the communications manager, a quarter of an hour before, going into the board room.

Josef walked across quickly to the desk under the big turret window. It was a massive affair of steel, bolted to the floor, with a nest of small drawers on either side of the knee-hole. Josef said quietly to himself, like a child memorising a lesson, "Fourth drawer from the top on the right-hand side."

The drawer was, as he had been told it would be, locked. He felt in his jacket pocket and pulled out a curious set of keys. Some had triangular shafts, some had a series of small wards no larger than pin heads, some had hollow shafts and no visible wards at all.

Josef was sweating now. A prickle of sweat stood out on his forehead and the palms of his hands were wet. In his haste he dropped the ring of keys and scrabbled for them on the carpet. It seemed to his strained senses to be an eternity before he knew that he had found the right one. It went easily into the tiny aperture and engaged the matrix of the lock with a reassuring click. Josef turned the key and the drawer slid open.

This was the crucial moment.

If anyone had discovered that the switch in the messenger's room was off and had switched it on again, an alarm would sound, emergency doors would close the staircases, the power in the lifts would be disconnected, and the street doors would be locked. Everyone would be not only a prisoner in the building, but immobilised on the floor on which they happened to be when the alarm went off.

Josef ran to the door, opened it, and listened. Life seemed to be continuing normally. He could hear the hum of the lifts going up and down and shouts of laughter from a room on the floor below. No alarm.

He ran back to the drawer and extracted from it a flat grey metal box, about the size of a book but much heavier. The box went into his briefcase which was already bulging with papers. He slammed the drawer shut, wiped the front of it with his handkerchief and remembered to wipe also the front

edge of the desk, where his left hand had rested. A moment later he was out of the room and descending the staircase to the floor below. He was calmer now. The worst was over.

Controlling his impatience, he joined a party in the dispatch department and spent five minutes with them. Then he made his excuses, strolled to the cloakroom to pick up hat and coat and overshoes from his locker, wished the giant doorman a "Happy Christmas" and walked out into the street.

It was a quarter to one, and the sleet which had fallen earlier in the day had turned to snow.

At five minutes past one, Mr. Fortescue, in London, was talking on a private line to Mr. Calder's cottage in Kent. He said, "Get your car, and drive straight to London Airport. I'll meet you there. You'll be away for two or three days." At ten past one Mr. Calder's car was rolling out of its garage. At half-past two he was seated in the VIP lounge at London Airport.

"Fortunately," said Mr. Fortescue, "there's an extra mid-afternoon flight for Düsseldorf. I've booked you on to it. It's about the only fortunate feature of the whole business. Behrens should be down here by this evening. I had to get him back from Leamington. I'll put him on the evening plane to Cologne-Bonn."

The loudspeakers were announcing the departure of the Düsseldorf flight, but Mr. Fortescue ignored them. There were things he had to tell Mr. Calder, even if the telling of them held up the plane.

When he had finished Mr. Calder said, "Do you think that the car crash *was* an accident?"

"I've no grounds, yet, for supposing anything else," said Mr. Fortescue. "We sent Leopold by a roundabout route via Frankfurt and private charter. I don't see how the opposition could possibly have anticipated this. Or how they could have made effective arrangements in time."

"I think you're right," said Mr. Calder. "Unfortunate that it should have happened when it did."

"You have a gift for understatement," said Mr. Fortescue. "I've arranged for Corrie to meet you. He'll give you the local picture. It isn't an entirely happy one, I'm afraid."

The loudspeaker made a third, plaintive announcement of the departure of the Düsseldorf flight and Mr. Calder walked out on to the runway—a thick, nondescript figure in a belted mackintosh, carrying a worn airplane flight satchel strapped

to one shoulder and the lives of a number of people in his hands.

Josef Bartz reached the Embassy at ten-past one. It would have been quicker if he had taken some form of transport, but despite the weight of the briefcase he was carrying, he preferred to walk. He suffered his first shock when he found that the public office, the entrance to which was conveniently tucked away in a sidestreet, was shut.

After a moment of indecision he walked round to the main door of the Embassy. This was open, but guarded by a commissionaire who looked doubtfully at him.

"I have to see Captain Massey," said Josef. He spoke fair English.

The commissionaire said, reluctantly, "In here, sir," and showed Josef into a waiting-room furnished with four hard chairs, a table and a portrait of the Queen. Josef put the briefcase down along the front of the chair and sat with his legs over it. Twenty minutes passed. Outside, the snow fell softly.

The commissionaire returned, bringing with him a young man with a long, sad, horse-like face who introduced himself as Mr. Bear. Mr. Bear was, it appeared, a third secretary. He had come to Bonn almost directly from Oxford, and his recruitment to the Foreign Service was one of those things which sometimes happens, even in the best organisations.

Mr. Bear explained to Josef that Captain Massey had had an accident. Well, yes, quite a serious accident. His deputy was, unfortunately, in Greece. If Herr Bartz could come back after the holiday was over a temporary replacement for Captain Massey would, no doubt, have been found, and he could deal with whatever business it was that Herr Bartz might wish to discuss.

Josef, his face suddenly pinched and white, said, "Impossible. I *must* see someone. It is of the highest importance. It cannot conceivably wait."

When he had said this three times, Mr. Bear sighed, rose to his feet and said that he would have a word with the first secretary. As he went out he said to the commissionaire, "There's a loony in the waiting-room. Better keep a careful eye on him, Forbes."

Martin Seccombe, disturbed at his lunch, listened briefly to what his junior had to report, and said, "Sounds like one of Massey's shady friends. He can wait till Monday," and

returned to a consideration of the ginger pudding which was one of the specialities of the Embassy chef.

Five minutes later Josef was out in the snow, still clutching his briefcase.

John Corrie met Mr. Calder at Düsseldorf, and during the forty-mile drive Mr. Calder was happy to let Corrie do the talking. He knew of him as an agent of the modern school, better at languages than at judo, more adept with a cipher machine and a computer than a gun or a knife; but a thoroughly reliable operator.

Corrie said, "It's not an easy set-up here at the moment. I'm all right, personally. The office looks after me, and backs me up. It's people like Massey I'm sorry for. The Embassy is suffering from one of its holier-than-thou fits. It's not the Ambassador's fault. He has his hands full doing his diplomatic work. I think the root of the trouble is the first secretary and some of the junior officials. Their policy is entirely negative. *Don't stir up trouble. Don't give any cause for provocation. Suppose there is a microphone in the Ambassador's drawing room, what does it matter?* We're so bloody discreet that anything we say can safely be relayed to Moscow or Peking. It'd be all right if the other side would play, but the East German government has got a very strong and active organisation right here in Bonn. It's not just an information-gathering outfit. It's equipped for strong-arm stuff as well. If ever there was a showdown, one of the first objectives would be to paralyse the government machinery in Bonn. The authorities here know it. They're not happy about it, and they'd like to take a strong line, but they don't know where to start. I've been getting a lot of co-operation from them lately. Lammerman, who's head of the security police here, has been particularly helpful. He put me on to Josef Bartz and we worked this ploy together. Damn this snow. If it gets any thicker the roads will be blocked before morning."

"Tell me about the ploy," said Mr. Calder.

"We've had our eyes on the PD outfit for some time. Headquarters in Warsaw, a very elaborate communications set-up, senior operatives all from the Eastern Zone. But we could never crack it. Its security was too good for us. Then Lammerman managed to get at Bartz, who was actually in the dispatch section. He handled him in the usual way. Paid him money for general information and copies of messages

which were no earthly use to us because we couldn't decode them. Then he put the pressure on. Offered him a very large sum indeed for the coding-machine itself. Bartz reckoned that if we could supply him with the right keys, he could lift the machine during the jollifications which go on before closing time on Christmas Eve. But he insisted that we give him sanctuary in England. Reasonable enough, really. He'd be a dead duck in Bonn. That's where Massey came in. He got the keys—it meant squaring the people who'd made the desk, but he did it—and when everything was set, he arranged for Leopold to come over to escort Bartz back to England. He had a private plane laid on for this evening. It may not be able to get off the ground now."

"Where's Bartz?" said Mr. Calder.

"Right now," said Corrie, "he's safe and sound in our Embassy, waiting for *you* to chaperon him on his journey back to England."

Josef came cautiously round the corner of the road in which he lived. A man was standing in the doorway opposite his apartment house; and there were two more in a parked car twenty yards along the street. Josef turned in his tracks, and stole back the way he had come. That earth was blocked. The manager must have checked on the coding-machine before leaving. He could imagine the flurry of orders. Any member of the dispatch department would be automatically suspect. Those who had left the building early, in particular. When they searched his desk they would find that the office carbons of all the messages he had sent in the past twelve months were gone too. That would have clinched the matter.

The briefcase weighed a ton. It was dragging his arm out of its socket. His first impulse was to throw it into someone's front garden. His second was that something might yet be salvaged from the mess. There were two things he had to do. He had to deposit the briefcase in safety. And he had to find somewhere to spend the night. The first, he thought, might be managed. There were private luggage lockers at all the rail and bus terminals. The second might not be so easy.

Mr. Calder said to Martin Seccombe, "You did *what*?"

"We had no instructions about him. The best we could do was to ask him to come back after the holiday, when someone would, presumably, have put us in the picture about him."

"And that was the *best* you could do, was it," said Mr.

Calder. "What was the worst? Shoot him out of hand?"

The first secretary flushed. He did not like Mr. Calder. He disliked his appearance, and his tone. Above all he disliked his lack of respect for the acting Head of Her Britannic Majesty's Embassy.

Before he could say anything, Mr. Calder added, "I suppose you realise that what Bartz was bringing us was not only this coding-machine. It was copies of all messages which had gone to Warsaw in the last year. When we'd decoded them we should have been able to identify the whole East German network, and the police would have cleaned it up, so that it would have stayed that way for a considerable time at least."

Martin Seccombe had got his breath back.

He said in what he hoped was an icily diplomatic voice, "I have no connection with Intelligence matters and no desire to know any details of them."

"Odd," said Mr. Calder. "Most people like to know *why* they've been sacked."

Martin Seccombe stared at him.

"When I report personally to the Head of the Foreign Office, as I shall when I get back, that you and this young man"—he swivelled round for a moment to look at Bear, who shifted uncomfortably under that baleful glare—"have, by your pompous stupidity, jeopardised one of the finest Intelligence breakthroughs since the war—and probably cost the defector his life—you'll be out of a job." He paused, at th door, and added, "Or maybe he'll move you to Saigon."

"What now?" said Corrie, as they climbed back into the car.

"We'll call on Lammerman," said Mr. Calder, "and see if he's got any ideas."

Colonel Lammerman, who was tall and thin and affected an eye glass said, "We originally got on to Josef Bartz through Mulbach. You know him, I expect."

"I've heard of him, of course," said Mr. Calder. "I've never had the pleasure of meeting him."

Franz Mulbach, who had been one of the prime movers in the German anti-Hitler movement, had saved his own life by luck and judgment after the July plot, and was now a senior member of the Bundeshaus. His name was respected in British Intelligence circles.

"If he has gone to anyone for help, he will have gone to Franz," said the colonel.

"Is there any reason why he shouldn't simply have booked

in at a hotel?" Calder said. "Under another name, of course."

"On any other night of the year, perhaps. Not on Christmas Eve," the colonel replied. "The hotels will all be full. Families come in from the country to finish their shopping and look at the lights. The restaurants and beer cellars stay open until all hours. He might get a room in one of the not-very-reputable hotels in the red light district, north of the river, but that would have its own perils."

"If he doesn't go to a hotel, what do you suppose he will do?" Corrie broke in.

"Walk the streets. Keep out of sight," Calder said.

"If he does that," said Colonel Lammerman, "he will be lucky to stay alive. Our Eastern friends are very strong among the taxi-drivers and newsvenders. They buy their allegiance, of course."

He turned to his second-in-command, a stocky Prussian of half his height and twice his girth and said, "You will alert all forces—civil police, military police and our own special patrols—to the possibilities of the situation. Our patrols should be doubled, and the necessary extra arms issued."

"I've got a feeling," said Corrie, "that this might be a lively night. I see that it's stopped snowing."

At six o'clock Ernst Dorfinger, who specialised in daylight hotel robbery, stepped cautiously out of one of the little streets leading to the main line station and started to cross the square diagonally towards the station entrance. He had had an excellent afternoon and the bulging briefcase grasped in his right hand contained an assortment of transistors, cameras and personal jewellery.

When he was three-quarters of the way across the square a parked car flicked its spotlight full on to him. Ernst hesitated, turned and ran. The car started up. It caught him before he could reach the shelter of the back streets. Three men jumped out. One hit Ernst in the stomach. As he doubled up, the others caught him and hauled him into the car. The briefcase was thrown in on top of him. The car reversed, and roared back across the square.

So quickly was it done that the policeman standing on the far pavement could hardly believe it had happened. As the car came towards him he jumped into the roadway and drew his revolver.

The car struck him squarely with its offside mudguard and

bumper, skidded on the frozen snow, recovered and raced off down the Kaiser Allee towards the river.

Franz Mulbach lived in an old house on the Furstenberg Allee. He received Corrie and Mr. Calder in the first floor living room overlooking the river. Mr. Calder noticed that although the house was old, the fittings were not. The original fireplace, which must have been big enough for the traditional yule log, had been filled in and a monstrous imitation electric log-fire twinkled in front of it. There was concealed lighting in the old plaster cornices and an outsize television set filled one corner of the room.

Franz Mulbach himself was an outsize man—huge shoulders, topping a barrel chest which rested shamelessly on a Falstaff of a stomach. Dressed in traditional white shirt, *Leder-hosen* and shoulder harness he looked like an enormously inflated schoolboy.

He weclomed Corrie as a friend, pressed glasses of Schnaps into their hands and said to Mr. Calder, "I know an old friend of yours; Mr. Behrens. We were together at one time during the war. A remarkable man."

"He should be here before midnight, unless all flights are grounded."

"So? A gathering of the eagles. Is there trouble expected?"

"We are in trouble," said Mr. Calder, and told him about it.

When he had finished, there was a short silence. Then Mulbach said, "Poor Josef. I have known him for nearly fifty years. We were at school together."

It seemed such an inadequate comment that Mr. Calder looked up in surprise. There was a hint of embarrassment in Mulbach's voice. But there was more than that. There was a note of reserve; and something else, almost the last thing he had expected to find in this stout, phlegmatic man: the tones of fear.

He sensed that a direct question at this point might lead to a rebuff. Instead, he said, "Who are these people who are hunting Bartz?"

"Scum," said Mulbach. "Professional criminals. Out-of-work bullies. In the days of Hitler they wore brown-shirts and drew their pay for assaulting Jews and Communists. The state no longer pays for services of this nature. Therefore, they are at the disposal of the Eastern network, who will pay them to hunt down anti-Communists."

"Mercenaries?"

"The trade of the mercenary was an honourable one," said Mulbach. "They insult it. They'd sell one employer to another for a few extra *Pfennigs*. They mix private vendettas with business. They—they make me sick."

But they frighten you, too, thought Mr. Calder.

There was nothing more to be gained. As they rose to go, Mulbach said, in the manner of someone picking his words very carefully, "*If* Josef had come to me for advice, I think I should have told him that his best chance of safety was in the red light district. The women there are rapacious, but they are an independent breed, and not dishonourable."

As they drove back to police headquarters, Mr. Calder said to Corrie, "I think Josef did come to our friend for asylum. And I think he turned him away. Rather surprising, for someone with his record."

"Mulbach is getting old," said Corrie. "Too old to be troubled by hooligans. He doesn't want a bomb in the boot of his car next time he drives to the Bundeshaus."

The telephone rang in the penthouse flat of one of the leading dental surgeons in Bonn and a voice said, "I am afraid that the subject will not now return to his flat. It has been watched continuously since two o'clock this afternoon."

"Keep one man there. Just in case."

"Very well. You heard, perhaps, that we had a little trouble earlier in the evening?"

"I heard about it."

"It was unfortunate. We got hold of the wrong man."

"He is none the worse for it, I hope?"

"Not a bit. I'm afraid we hurt the policeman. He should not have got in the way. I think it will mean trouble."

"If they want trouble," said the dentist, "we can give them trouble. Plenty of it. Call out all our reserves. Their first job will be to comb through the brothel area. Understood?"

"Bed by bed," said the voice at the other end of the telephone happily.

Since the war a new Bonn has arisen from the ashes of the old. It lies to the south of the river and contains the parliament house, the government buildings and the respectable homes of the functionaries who work in them. But north of the river the remains of the old town still cluster round the Electoral Palace and the shell of the Minster. This is a place of small, cobbled streets ending in flights of steps, of dark courts and blind alleys.

The least respectable part of this disreputable quarter lies between the Stefanienstrasse and the Lichtentalerstrasse. The Hotel Wagram stands exactly halfway along the road joining these thoroughfares.

Red Maria was so called on account of her hair, not her politics. She dispensed her favours from a room on the first floor at the back of this hotel and was a woman of undoubted attractions but uncertain temper. When she heard the knocking, she climbed out of bed, padded across the floor in bare feet, opened the door six inches, and said, "Go to hell, stinking little monkey. I am busy."

It was the proprietor of the hotel who had knocked. He said apologetically, "There are men downstairs, Maria. They insist on coming up."

Maria slammed the door and bolted it.

Five minutes later came a renewed knocking, this time heavier and more urgent. Maria ignored it. A body crashed into the door. This was too much. Maria got up, seized a bottle from the top of the chest of drawers and unbolted the door. As she did so the man outside charged again. This time the door gave way and he came in with it. Maria hit him with her bottle.

There was a scream from somewhere above them of "Police," followed by a crash of broken china and a series of bumps as though a heavy body was being thrown down the stairs.

The man on the bedroom floor groaned and got up on to his knees. Maria, her flaming hair a red aureole above her bare shoulders, raised her bottle again. The man fumbled in his pocket, jerked out a gun and pulled the trigger.

The shot missed Maria and hit a looking-glass over the mantelpiece. Maria threw her bottle at the man and bolted out on to the landing.

Outside, in the street, the shot had been heard. Two men jumped from a waiting car and ran into the hotel. At that moment a police tender turned the corner of the Stefanienstrasse and came rocketing down the street, its spotlight playing on the front of the hotel. Three of the *Feldengendarmerie* tumbled out. A fusillade of bullets from the first storey stopped them in their tracks. One man was hit and rolled back behind the car. The other two dived for shelter.

This was the beginning of the battle of the Hotel Wagram, which ultimately involved five car-loads of the special patrols and more than forty policemen.

Mr. Calder, back at headquarters, listened to the reports coming in. Colonel Lammerman, who was directing the police side of the battle by telephone from his desk, seemed unperturbed at the damage and casualties.

"Tonight," he said, "they show their hand. Good. They are forced out into the open. Better still." He spoke to the commandant of military police, to direct further reinforcements to the scene.

At one o'clock, when the shooting had died down, the casualties were being counted and the first batch of prisoners was being brought in, the door opened and Mr. Behrens walked through it. Considering that he had been lifted from the ninth tee on the Leamington Spa golf course by military helicopter, transported to London Airport, put on the night flight to Germany and driven by fast car in to Bonn, he looked remarkably cheerful and unruffled.

Mr. Calder greeted him with relief. Mr. Behrens' knowledge of Germany and things German was a great deal more extensive than his own.

"You seem to be having quite a party," said Mr. Behrens.

"More like Walpurgis Night than Christmas Eve," agreed Mr. Calder. He sketched an outline of the proceedings so far.

At the end of it, Mr. Behrens said, "Do I understand that when you visited Franz Mulbach, you got the impression that Bartz had asked him for asylum and been refused?"

"He didn't actually say so, but that was the implication."

"And you thought he had turned him away because he was afraid of retaliation."

"That's the general idea," said Mr. Calder, looking curiously at his old friend. "Could I have been wrong?"

"I've heard a lot of odd stories tonight, but that tops the lot. Franz Mulbach, afraid! He hasn't a nerve in his fat body. He's been a fighter all his life. Do you remember what Schiller made old Wallenstein say? '*Ein ruheloser Marsch war unser Leben*'—'our life was a restless march.' People like that don't change, you know."

"If he wasn't afraid, he was acting."

"Very likely," said Mr. Behrens. "But I wonder why. Do you think we could venture out into the streets without getting shot?"

"The police could lend us a car."

"I'd rather walk," said Mr. Behrens. "I've spent the last twelve hours being driven by other people. I'd like to stretch my legs."

The snow underfoot had frozen and it squeaked as they walked on it. They avoided the main roads and went by quiet residential streets. There were still lights in a few of the windows, and the sound of singing and music as families sat together to welcome once again the dawn of the Christ child's birthday. In the half mile between the police station and Franz Mulbach's house they met no-one.

There were lights in the Mulbach house, too; and it was Franz himself who opened the door. He had changed out of his *Leder-hosen*, and looked a great deal more businesslike in roll-necked sweater, dark trousers and short leather coat. He had one hand under the flap of the coat and Mr. Calder noticed that he only half opened the heavy front door, in such a manner that it shielded him, but left him a free field of fire. He peered at them for a moment, then swung the door wide open, jumped out and started pump-handling Mr. Behrens' right arm.

"All right, Franz, all right," said Mr. Behrens. "I'm glad to see you, too, but there's no need to break my arm off."

"What a Christmas present," said Mulbach. "My old friend. Your colleague said that you were coming to Germany. What a surprise!"

"It surprised me, too," said Mr. Behrens.

"Come in, come in." Mulbach led the way to the first floor living room, and switched on the lights. Mr. Calder saw that the windows were shuttered. "The occasion demands brandy."

Whilst their host was pouring out the drinks Mr. Behrens peered curiously around the room, as if weighing up its possibilities. Then he accepted the bulbous glass from Franz Mulbach, sniffed the contents with appreciation, and said, "Where have you put poor Josef Bartz?"

Mulbach did not even blink. He sniffed at his own brandy, said, "This came from Strohe at Klagenfurt. It should be good. Poor Josef. Yes, he was very upset."

"I can understand that."

"I wonder if you can? He was frightened for his own skin. That was natural. He was also bewildered. When the emissaries of a country that has a reputation for keeping its word say to a man, 'Steal this for us. Come straight to our Embassy and we will guarantee your safety'...When they say this, and then turn him away from the doors of the Embassy—"

"It was partly our fault," said Mr. Calder. "And partly

our misfortune. If Captain Massey had not been killed—"

"Killed! I heard nothing of that."

"An accident, we think."

Mr. Calder told him. When he had finished, Mulbach swivelled round to look directly at Mr. Behrens. "Is this true?" he said. "When I heard Josef's story I concluded that there had been a change of plan. That it now suited your book, for some deep reason, that he should be caught."

"It's one of the occupational hazards of Intelligence work," said Mr. Behrens, "that when you do something simple and straightforward, everyone suspects a double motive and a treble bluff. It happened just as Calder said."

"So. But there is one thing I do not yet see. Why should you suppose that I would have Josef here?"

"'*Ein ruheloser Marsch—*'" began Mr. Behrens.

"You remember that," said Mulbach, delighted. "Schiller is a great poet, yes?" He repeated the words under his breath, savouring them. Then he said, "I will give you back another quotation. From Goethe, this time. You know what he said was the greatest ordeal? '*Sich zu beschranken und zu isolieren*'—'to be small, and alone.' Allow me to present you—"

As he spoke, he must have pressed some sort of spring, for the side wall of the old fireplace pivoted back on itself, revealing a narrow opening. Just large enough to accommodate a man. Out of it stepped a still apprehensive Josef Bartz.

At six o'clock that morning Colonel Lammerman said to Mr. Calder, "A highly satisfactory night's work. I do not think that the *Sturm-gruppen* of our Eastern friends will function properly again for many months. We have lost one man —the first, the one who was run down by the car. He died an hour ago. And we have six wounded, two quite severely. They have three dead and sixteen wounded. And we have thirty-three prisoners in our hands."

"Will this enable you to break them?" said Mr. Calder. "For good, I mean."

"That would be too much to hope. The central organisation—the men at the very top—are still out of our reach. I doubt if any of the hired bullies who took part in tonight's manœuvres even know their names."

Mr. Behrens scribbled something on a piece of paper and passed it to the colonel. "Does this name mean anything to you?" he said.

The colonel looked at what was written. Then said sharply, "Where did you get that information?"

"From a very old friend," said Mr. Behrens. "But I don't think he'd like to be quoted."

"I imagine not," said the colonel. He tore the paper into small pieces and dropped the pieces into the fire. "You will appreciate that in his legitimate business this man has many powerful friends and allies. If I, myself, suggested anything against him, and could not prove it to the hilt, I should stand in more danger than he would."

Mr. Behrens walked over to the window. The first, grey light of morning was beginning to steal back into the sky. There had been no more snow.

He said, "I imagine it should be quite possible for a light plane to take off from the airport?"

"I would think so," said the colonel. "Why?"

"A thought had occurred to me. There will be no regular service. But suppose we asked the airline—suppose, in fact, we appealed personally to the chairman, as a favour to the State—to arrange for a transport craft to be available to fly, shall we say, *a valuable cargo* back to London?"

The colonel stared at Mr. Behrens for a long moment in complete silence. Then, for the first time that night, a smile creased his face, broke and dissolved into a harsh bellow of laughter. He rose to his feet and stamped across the floor, slapping his side as he did so. "*Wunderbar!*" he said. "*Kolossal.*" Then he stopped laughing, swung round, and said, "But dangerous."

"Oh, I don't know about that," said Behrens. "There's a little risk, certainly. They mightn't rise to the bait at all. But give them plenty of time. We shan't want the plane before nine o'clock at the earliest. If you're in any real difficulty, you can always get the army to help you."

The favour to the State was an Army Transport Command medium-sized personnel carrier with removable seats, one of a number which had been sold to the airline in the late fifties, when it was replaced in service by the DC all-purpose model. The airline used them for transporting staff and spares.

Mr. Calder, as he climbed on board at ten o'clock that morning, noticed that four seats had been installed on either side of the gangway. He surmised that they were to have an escort.

Josef Bartz climbed in behind Mr. Calder. He had had an

uneasy two hours' sleep in a cell at the police station and the white glare off the snow accentuated the greyness of his face. Behind him came Mr. Behrens, who was carrying a bulging briefcase.

Christmas and the snow had combined to empty the air-strip and its approaches. Mr. Calder was glad to see this. It left room for manœuvre, he thought.

Two open Volkswagens appeared from the crew quarters. They carried six passengers. Two were clearly the pilot and co-pilot. The other four were less easy to place. Their overalls suggested airline mechanics; their build, professional wrestlers; their faces, policemen.

"They're doing us proud," said Mr. Behrens. "I think I recognise that pilot. Isn't it Merker?"

"The *Luftwaffe* ace?"

"I think so. His co-pilot looks like an ex-*Luftwaffe* man too. There's something quite unmistakable about them, you know."

"Agreed," said Mr. Calder. "You can't mistake them. Any more than you can mistake an English naval officer in plain clothes. Good morning, gentlemen."

The cabin crew were climbing on board. Smiles and greetings were exchanged. The largest of the four large men introduced himself as Major Osler.

"We have had special instructions," he said, "to see personally to the safety of you—and your cargo."

He glanced round at Josef, who had sunk back into his seat and was staring glumly out at the empty, snow-covered expanse of the airfield.

"I'm only sorry," said Mr. Calder, "that you should have been forced to work on Christmas Day."

"In an affair of national importance," said Major Osler, showing his strong teeth in a smile, "the loss of a Christmas holiday is a minor consideration." He closed the door and fastened the eccentric catches. The pilot had switched on now. They could hear the four motors starting up, one after the other, on their warming-up run. Josef was fiddling with his seat belt.

"No need to fasten yourself in yet," said Major Osler.

He explained: "We have to taxi out to the far runway. It is the clearest of the four. We shall be ten minutes or more before—"

He stopped as the pilot shouted something, revved up his engines and then, unexpectedly, switched them all off.

The nose of an armoured car had appeared from behind the administration building. It drove deliberately out on to the runway. Behind it came three more. They fanned out, one coming to a halt immediately in front of the airplane, two of them flanking it and one behind it. Once in position they, too, switched off their engines.

Mr. Calder stood up. He ignored both the gun which had appeared in Major Osler's hand and the ugly look on his face. In the silence which had fallen, his voice was loud enough for everyone in the airplane to hear.

"It's no use, Major," he said. "You're outgunned." As if to underline his words, the turret of the nearest armoured car swung directly towards them and they looked into the barrels of the twin Vickers. "You can't move the plane whilst those cars are there, and any one of them could blow your tail off with one burst. I suggest we relax."

"In case," added Mr. Behrens mildly, "you should think it worth some desperate move, do let me assure you that the property you were instructed to fly to Eastern Germany is *not* in this briefcase. It is in a safe in the airport, under armed guard. All I have here"—he opened the briefcase—"is two bottles of Schnaps and a Christmas present for my aunt."

For a moment Mr. Calder thought that Major Osler was going to use his gun. Then the vicious light died in his eyes and his face resumed its look of stony indifference. The faint beginning of a smile lifted the corners of the thin mouth. The major said, in the tones of a fencer whose guard has been penetrated, "*In Ordnung, mein Herr.*"

"We had bad luck and good," said Mr. Behrens to Mr. Fortescue. "Bad luck about Massey, and that ass Martin Seccombe. I hope something *will* be done about getting rid of him, by the way. But good luck over Franz Mulbach. And the best bit of luck right at the end. I was quite sure that if we appealed to the airline to help us they would seize the God-sent opportunity to hi-jack the three of us, and the coding-machine, and fly us straight across to the Eastern Zone."

"It was a very feasible counter-stroke," agreed Mr. Fortescue. "But how could you be sure?"

"The head of their organisation," said Mr. Behrens, "whose name Mulbach gave us, happens to be chairman of the airline."

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AT NIGHT THE SUN SHINES

by FELIX MARTI-IBANEZ

DOCTOR," said the man, "I'm afraid I'm losing my mind."

My eyes wandered from the man's tortured face to his long thin fingers twitching nervously in the circle of light cast by the lamp on my desk.

"What would you think," he continued in an anguished voice, "if I told you that I owe my fame and fortune to a woman with whom I'm madly in love, yet I'm afraid she exists only in my imagination?

"You probably know my name. Millions of people do. Leslie Normand. You must have heard my blues, *At Night the Sun Shines.* The biggest hit in the last fifty years. Millions of recordings of it have been sold, a Broadway musical play is based on its lyrics and score, and a film will be released soon. Overnight I hit the jackpot; I became rich and famous. But nobody knows that it is not my song. That is to say, I composed it, but it was a woman who gave it body and soul and placed it, alive and vibrating, in my hands. I must find that woman, Doctor. But first, before I continue this mad search, I must make sure that I am not insane.

"It all began one Sunday last August. New Yorkers sweltered under a scorching sun. The heat had increased to the point of desperation the feeling of depression that had been heavy upon me all summer. I, Leslie Normand, forty years old, created dreams nobody wanted. For twenty years I had been hammering out sweet little songs on the piano, with foolish sentimental lyrics about love and suffering, the moon,

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the stars, God knows what! Songs into which I poured all my dreams and hopes, only to see them tossed aside by some fat, bald agent with a cigar stuck between his rotting yellowed teeth.

"Hot, tired and lonely, I decided to go to Jones Beach. I joined the half-naked mass of humanity sprawled on the sand. The sun was a weight pressing down on my body, sinking into the burning skin. A half-hour later, oppressed by the masses of sweating flesh all around me, I went down to the water and swam out as far as I could. When the metallic cold of the ocean had shaken me out of my stupor, I just floated. It was then that I saw the girl, her wet face beneath her blue bathing cap glistening under the sun, her eyes half-closed, her lips a crimson line.

"We were alone in the rippling blue waters, about a hundred yards from the beach. She glided by a few feet from me, her face serene; her body in a blue bathing suit was one more serpentine ripple in the blue sea. I saw a blue stone sparkling on her right hand. And then she was gone.

"I swam back to the beach and lay down on the sand close to the water. And as soon as I closed my eyes, the obsession returned and swallowed me up.

"Doctor, you don't know what torment there is in creating music. I have no talent other than composing, and even then I write only what highbrows contemptuously call 'popular music.' My whole world revolves around what to me is the greatest music of all—the blues. Perhaps my childhood in Chicago is responsible. Every night I wandered through the alleys in the Loop, peering through the windows into bars and cafés, and I would stand still until the early hours of the morning under the glaring lights of the dance halls, listening to the piercing music, my young heart filled with an anguish I could not understand. Later, sleeping on my cot, I would hear the music in my dreams.

"I was only a boy when I composed my first song, *Dead Child Blues*. This was followed by *Windy City Blues*, in which I tried in vain to capture the heartrending sordidness of Chicago's slums: the flickering lights beckoning in the night, the shadowy streets where the hungry and the lonely lurk, dim bars where eyes stare vacantly through thick cigarette smoke, entwined lovers in dark corners trying to keep warm with their love.

"I'm not trying to tell you the whole story of my life, but what I have said may help to explain how the obsession

started. I tried to capture the obsession in my song, *At Night the Sun Shines.* Great cities like New York are cemeteries where people are buried alive under the weight of many a torturing fear: fear of the present and the future, fear of reality, of losing their jobs and all they possess, of love and their inability to love, of sickness, loneliness, starvation—in short, fear of life. Every morning these living corpses are wound up like mechanical toys and they go forth into subways and buses and then into offices and factories, and they push and rush and fret and worry and bicker and quarrel until, the day over, they return to the tomb whence they started. And they go to bed with the burden of their fears for a blanket. The following morning they start all over again.

"But there are those who are liberated when night falls. They have discovered poetry in the great city. For them the traffic lights are rubies and emeralds; they seek the reflection of the moon in Central Park Lake, not in the neon orgy of Times Square; they roam the streets, wondering about the people behind lighted windows and making up their own stories; they press their nose against the glass panes of bars and cafés trying to guess what mysteries lie within the walls beyond; they pick up a fallen leaf in October and dream. They go through life with an insatiable curiosity and a romantic imagination that fill their hearts with the sound of music always.

"It was for these people that I wrote my last blues. No-one could possibly guess the months I spent trying to put down on paper the plaintive, passionate music that I could feel swelling and surging inside my head. But, like a live fish, it kept slipping through my fingers.

"Well or badly, a writer can put down what he feels. This is not so with a composer. Either one writes down the music one feels or one writes nothing. Week after week I pounded the piano, five, six, eight hours every night, but the fragments of music were like the pieces of a puzzle that would not fit together. The music welled and swelled inside me, whole and complete, yet what my fingers beat out on the keys was all broken up, discordant, disconnected. I would play on and on only to realise in the end that it was all a mere fragment of my blues. Night after night all summer long, when I didn't pound the piano, I hummed the haunting melody till perspiration rolled down my face, dropping on the keys. Through my open window I could see the lighted windows of the building across the street. Like restless eyes that could not reconcile

themselves to sleep, they remained on all through the night, incessantly taunting me, mocking me. Desperately I would continue scribbling on my music sheets, but my hands failed to capture even one measure of the great treasure of harmonies within me. A thousand fragments of the musical garment had to be knitted together. An emperor's cloak had to be made out of beggars' rags.

"On the beach that Sunday in August, my mind was to have no rest. As soon as I closed my eyes, the haunting melody possessed me still once more. Suddenly something flared up within me. At first it was like a tiny hole of light in a thick curtain. Then, as if someone had placed his fingers in the hole and ripped it open, a torrent of light poured in. Very softly I could hear the melody of my blues, flowing, continuous, complete, exactly as I had felt it for months; all the scattered links joined, all the threads of confused colours woven into a harmonious musical tapestry. Not daring to move, afraid of frightening the voice that was singing inside me, with bated breath I listened. Slowly it became clearer and clearer, more and more as I had dreamed it. Cautiously I opened my eyes. The melody went right on! It was as though someone were singing it right beside me. And it was true! Someone behind me was humming my blues, the blues I had not yet composed.

"Even before I turned my head I knew who it was that was singing. She was leaning back, her face lifted to the sun, eyes closed, hands buried in the sand, knees drawn up. The blue cap was lying on the sand. An aquamarine suddenly sparkled on her sandy hand. I stared at her, stupefied. She slowly opened her eyes and leaned forward until her face was close to mine. Her eyes were incredibly blue.

"I stammered, 'The blues you were humming . . .'

"She looked away, her eyes reflecting the drifting white clouds.

"'They're very sad,' she whispered. 'They're the dreams of those who dream awake at night.'

"Despite the heat there was a cold sweat on my forehead. I said, 'It's a very strange song. I've never heard it—complete.'

"'No-one has ever heard the entire song. It's a dream, and dreams are mysteries of which we get but fleeting glimpses. It's a melody that has no direction, like a bee endlessly zigzagging in the sunlight.'

"She was putting into words exactly what I had felt and

lived through during those long summer months of work. My elusive melody was like the humming flight of the bee with its fantastic spirals and spinnings in the blue.

"As though talking to herself, she continued, 'And yet, the flight of the bee has a goal which only the bee knows. Its capricious spinnings are actually invisible roads leading to the honey.'

"She stood up suddenly. Her frail, long body was still that of an adolescent. I also stood up and handed her the blue bathing cap. She smiled and walked away. I quickly joined her and silently we walked towards the wooden steps leading to the bathhouses.

"Utterly bewildered, I finally asked her, 'Do you like blues?'

"'I don't know,' she answered. 'I don't have time to listen to music. I have very little time for anything. I'm constantly busy, night and day.'

"I asked her what kept her so absorbed all the time. 'Dreaming,' she replied. She said it very seriously and she looked strangely pathetic.

"We reached the entrance to the bathhouses. For the first time since we started talking I realised that we were surrounded by a bustling multitude. I smelled oily lotions on burnt shoulders and tasted salt on my lips. She nodded at me and turned to enter the women's bathhouse.

"'Wait, please!' I begged her. 'We can't separate like this. I would like to see you again.'

"Wiping the last drops of water off her face, she asked, 'What is it you want?'

"I insisted that I must talk to her, but she said, 'Not today. It has been too much already. It's enough for today.' She seemed to be talking to herself. She continued, 'But if you really want to see me again, I'll be here, at this door, next Sunday at noon. Goodbye.'

"Before I could say anything further she disappeared through the door. I stood there for a moment, stunned, confused. Then I ran to my locker, quickly got dressed, and ran to the exit of the women's bathhouse. I sat down on a bench opposite the door and waited. Hours passed and I saw many women go in and out. In vain I searched for her face. Not until closing time did I admit to myself that she must have gone.

"I returned to Manhattan in a state of fierce agitation. I had given up trying to find any explanation for what had

happened, but I cursed myself a thousand times for not having asked her how and where she had heard my song. I tried to tell myself that I should at least rejoice over the fantastic miracle. But as I was about to open the door of my apartment, it came to me suddenly that the girl could not have heard my blues anywhere for the simple reason that I had not finished composing them!

"I sat down at the piano. Thanks to the girl with the blue eyes, I now had my complete melody. I touched the keys softly, like a father caressing the head of his newborn child. I feared that the sound of the piano would drive away the melody in my head. Once more I played and hastily scribbled notes on paper. I struggled for hours. When I finally looked up from my work, the lights across the street seemed to mock me. I had been hammering at the keys like a blacksmith, but I had scarcely written down the beginning of the melody. I had thought that I could run through the whole song that night, but I was stuck after the first few bars.

"The week dragged. I tried again and again to give body to the ghost of my blues, but my desperate attempts were in vain. The following Sunday was a bleak day. At nine o'clock I was already at Jones Beach, sure that it all had been a dream. A clock somewhere was striking noon when she appeared, clad in a blue dress with a dark-red belt, her light-brown hair brushed straight back, hanging below her shoulders. She looked even younger than in her bathing suit. She carried nothing, and I guessed that she thought it was too cool to swim. Slowly we went along the walk that led to the garden.

"'My name is Leslie Normand,' I said after a few steps. 'Please forgive me for not telling you last Sunday. I was so stunned I must have seemed very stupid to you.'

"'It doesn't matter. Names don't mean anything. They can be beautiful or ugly, important or silly, according to the people they belong to. We really should never hear a person's name until we know him well.'

"Just the same, I asked her name. She shrugged her shoulders. 'Call me Anabelle, a poetic name, although no-one has written verses to me.'

"We sat on the bench near great clumps of begonias. I couldn't cross the barrier that seemed to stand between the strange girl and myself. There was a disturbed look in her eyes that contrasted with the serenity of her face.

"I began to say that there was something I wished to ask

her, but she interrupted me. 'You don't have to ask. You'd like to hear me sing again. I knew you wanted to see me because of the song.'

"'Anabelle, how—?'

"And again she interrupted me. 'Dreams are not personal property. When a dream goes forth into the world in the form of a story, a movie, a song, it becomes millions of little flames burning everywhere, kindled by that first fire. But a dream can also be shared even before it takes form. It's a beautiful song. It will make many people dream.'

"Closing her eyes, she began to hum my blues. I listened as in a trance, wondering whether it was my song or hers. There was a new depth in the music that I hadn't noticed before. I closed my eyes and my hand found hers. Waves of nostalgia swirled in my head: pale faces, candlelight, paths quivering with autumn leaves, carriages silently rolling down streets gleaming with rain. When Anabelle stopped, the music went on and on. I knew then that it would never leave me again.

"We returned to the city together, talking very little. We walked along the Hudson on Riverside Drive, had dinner by candlelight in the Village, danced to soft music. She smiled when we toasted each other with champagne. Later, we strolled through the deserted streets of the Village. It rained, but we didn't care.

"And then she said she had to leave and that I was not to go with her.

"I pleaded that I could not let her go alone at that hour, that I would take her home, that I had to see her again the following day. She pushed me away gently, and her eyes again had the strange, disturbed look.

"'You can't come with me,' she said firmly. 'You have your song. Now you must let me go.'

"I insisted that the song meant nothing to me, that I wanted to see her again, that it was only the beginning for us. Sadly she replied, 'This is the beginning for you. For me— I don't know.'

"'But this is all so strange. You have never told me how you knew my song.'

"She said she didn't know the answer to that.

"'It doesn't matter, nothing matters but you,' I insisted. 'I can't lose you now. You gave me my song, but now you're taking away something that means even more to me.'

"It was useless. She said that perhaps some day we would meet again. We would look for each other and find each other again. I felt powerless to hold her. She got into a taxi and I watched it drive away.

"Doctor, I have looked for Anabelle all over New York. I have returned to the places where we went together. I put ads in the personal columns of the papers. Nothing. All in vain.

"The only hope left was the song. I had thought that once it was published, she might come to me again. You know the rest. The whole country is singing *At Night the Sun Shines*, but still there has been no sign of life from Anabelle.

"Last night I noticed for the first time that the building across the street whose lights I had watched throughout the sleepless summer nights was a psychiatric clinic. That's why I'm here, Doctor. Day and night I'm obsessed by the thought that it was all a dream, a hallucination. I fear for my sanity. Please help me. Please, Doctor, please, tell me what I can do."

There was a long pause. The man's hands were clenched on his lap. Night had enfolded the building in black velvet. A cool breeze stole through the half-open window, warning us of the approaching winter.

"I may not be able to explain everything," I said, "but I think I can explain some of it. Come with me."

Leslie Normand followed me silently down the hall into the elevator, and we went up to the fifth floor.

"Here we have several patients in partial seclusion," I explained. "Some have been interned by their families, others come here of their own free will. Sometimes they recover and never return here; at other times recovery is temporary, and after a few days in the world of light, the patient returns to the darkness of his psychosis."

We stopped in front of a door with a little window covered with white netting enabling one to look inside without being seen by the occupant of the room. Leslie Normand looked at me with puzzled eyes.

"Life can be even stranger than the fantasies you invent in your songs," I said. "Look through this window."

He did as I said, and when he turned back to me, his face was chalk-white.

"Anabelle!" he whispered.

I looked in myself. In the dimly-lit room, a girl dressed

in azure blue stood by an open, barred window, her eyes staring at the windows on the opposite side of the street. The aquamarine on one of her fingers beckoned at us with flashes of blue light.

"Anabelle Delorme," I said, gently pulling Leslie Normand away from the door. "She's an orphan with a moderate income that has enabled her to live here since she first noticed the symptoms of her illness. Professional ethics forbid my giving you complete details, but you love her and you should know the truth. Three months ago Anabelle left of her own accord. She came back one Monday at dawn. Since then she has spent most of her time looking through that window, silent, far away in her mysterious inner world."

"But, Doctor," Normand cried piteously, "is there any hope? Is there anything that can be done?"

"We're doing all we can. I really believe that you've done more good than all our treatments in the past two years. Your windows on the other side of the street must be on the same level as hers. Night after night Anabelle must have listened to you playing the piano. She listened to the desperate shreds of music you played all night long and her hypersensitive mind wove the melody that she sang to you on the beach. I can't explain the rest. Perhaps she saw you at your window, recognised you on the street, and followed you to the beach. Only she could explain that. But there is your 'hallucination,' the woman who completed your famous blues song."

Colour rushed back to Leslie Normand's face.

"Doctor,"—there was happiness in his voice—"if there was one miracle, there can be another. I'm going to help you bring Anabelle back to real life, and one day we'll create dreams together. She's no longer alone in her private dream world."

"You can help a great deal. It'll be difficult but not impossible. We'll bring your music back to her, try to evoke memories of you, awaken associations of ideas, create light within her."

At the door to the street Normand grasped my hand.

"I assure you, time is not important to me, Doctor. I can wait."

Back in my office I opened a book, but I could not read. Soft distant notes floated in through the window, notes of infinite sweetness and nostalgia, as though the night itself were playing its mysteries on an invisible piano.

THE CLOCK MAN

BY WALLACE REYBURN

I WAS six years of age. It was 1918. I was living with my mother and sister at a hotel while my father was at the war. He would be returning shortly but meanwhile we stayed on at the Oriental Kiosk.

It was an odd name for a hotel. It had that name partially because it was on the shore of Oriental Bay, on the outskirts of Wellington. But why "Kiosk," I never did know.

The hotel was at the terminus of the tramway line from the centre of the city and that provided one of the major enjoyments of that period of my youth.

The trams were of the sort that could be driven from either end and when one of them reached the terminus it was necessary to move the trolley pole around for the return journey. Most of the conductors would let me do this for them.

There was a coiled spring at the base of the pole to keep it tight against the overhead wire and when I pulled the rope of the trolley pole to free it, that spring would exert considerable upward pressure. I had barely enough weight at that age to counteract this and as I swung the pole around it was the most exhilarating feeling—gliding along the length of the tram firmly grasping the rope, almost taking off but not quite, then to lodge the little wheel at the top of the pole into the overhead wire again and, with luck, see a few blue flashes as I did so. It was the thrill of my young lifetime.

After school each day I used to sit at the foot of the steps from the lawn in front of the hotel and wait for each tram to come in sight around the bend in the coast road. They weren't nearly as frequent as the timetable claimed they were, but I didn't mind the wait. It was the happiest part of the day for me, that hour or so at the terminus before it was time for me to be called in to supper.

By the side of the road across from where the trams stopped was a waiting-room, more appropriately called a "shelter shed," since it afforded shelter from the cold, wet wind off the sea in winter and from the blistering sun in summer.

It was a fairly elaborate affair, probably donated by someone who remembered having to wait endlessly for trams that never seemed to come and who, when he made his money, decided to provide future passengers with a measure of comfort.

Above the entrance was a large clock and from time to time a man would come and clean it. Watching him mount his ladder with his bucket and rags and wash the glass cover and the face of the clock was always something for me to do between trams.

If he was in a good mood he would let me climb up the ladder and have a look out across the beach to the shipping in the harbour, the yachts and other small boats going in and out among the bays and inlets, the buildings of the city in the distance and the mountains beyond. Not that the view from there was as good as could be had from the hotel, up on the slope. But climbing the ladder was a little adventure and it had the added appeal, like switching the trolley pole, of doing something that grown-ups did.

I always had a chat with the clock man, although it was against my mother's wishes. She said she didn't want me to be seen talking to him.

"Why not?" I asked her.

"He's not a nice man," she said.

"He seems all right to me," I said.

She tried to explain. It seemed that when all the other able-bodied men had gone off to Europe to fight in the war he had chosen to stay behind. At numerous times he had been sent a white feather, but by various ways and means he had managed to evade going overseas. I was too young to understand the full significance of white feathers. The war was over now, anyway, so I couldn't see that it made much odds.

One day, when I had just finished getting a tram organised for its return trip into town the clock man arrived with his ladder and set about cleaning the clock.

I was on the point of going over to talk to him when there was the sound of a ship's siren. It was taken up by other ships in the harbour and at the wharfs.

I soon saw what the commotion was about. There was

a big liner coming in. It presented a fine sight. Painted wartime grey, bunting flying from its masts, it steamed up the harbour in the bright sunshine, its decks crowded with returned soldiers waving and cheering to people in the boats that had gone out to meet it.

The clock man had kept at his work, but he turned around now to look at the ship. I happened to glance up as he appeared to lose his foothold on the ladder. He tried to grab at the archway of the entrance but the ladder shot away from under him and he crashed down on to the pavement.

He hadn't fallen from a great height but he had fallen awkwardly. His head hit the concrete with a crack.

I was scared to go to him. There was blood all about. Some people ran to him and then, when I did pluck up courage to go nearer, I heard one of them say, "He's dead."

It stays vividly in your mind, seeing death for the first time at that early age.

It is one of the first things I ever remember. But at six I didn't know anything about irony. I didn't even know the word existed.

It was only later, looking back on it, that I realised the irony of that man who had devoted so much effort and gone through so much humiliation to get out of going to the war and out there on that ship were those soldiers who had come through it all unscathed.

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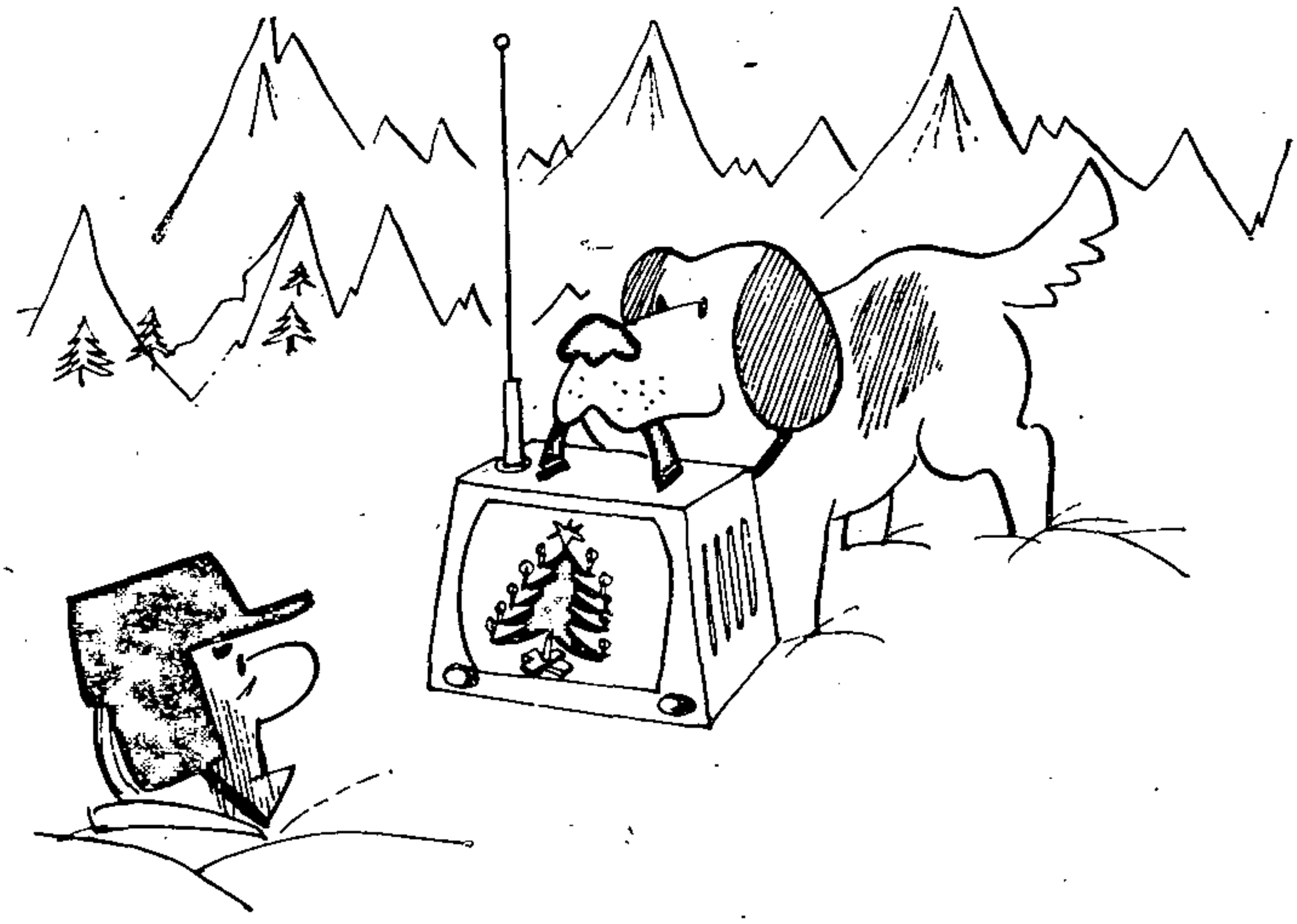


Even in a put-up job each of us wanted to win THE MOST BEAUTIFUL

BEFORE I knew which end was up and could stand for my honourable instincts, Truffi had us talked into it. He'd called the meeting; we sat around a table in a corner of the plaza, nobody else around us, all the waiters shooed off.

Truffi—dark, deep-eyed, long-jawed. He was an amazing driver; we five were the best in the world at that time; the best in Italy, so, the earth's best.

"It is hundreds of thousands in *lire*, more than a hundred thousand in the American dollar," Truffi said, opening his right hand and shutting it as if he had a girl in it. A very wonderful girl. "That's the first prize, the big raffle prize. And it will go to some peasant. A national racing lottery, to some peasant! Now, what I am saying is, I am saying *we* go to the peasant first. To one of the five people who will win these five tickets."

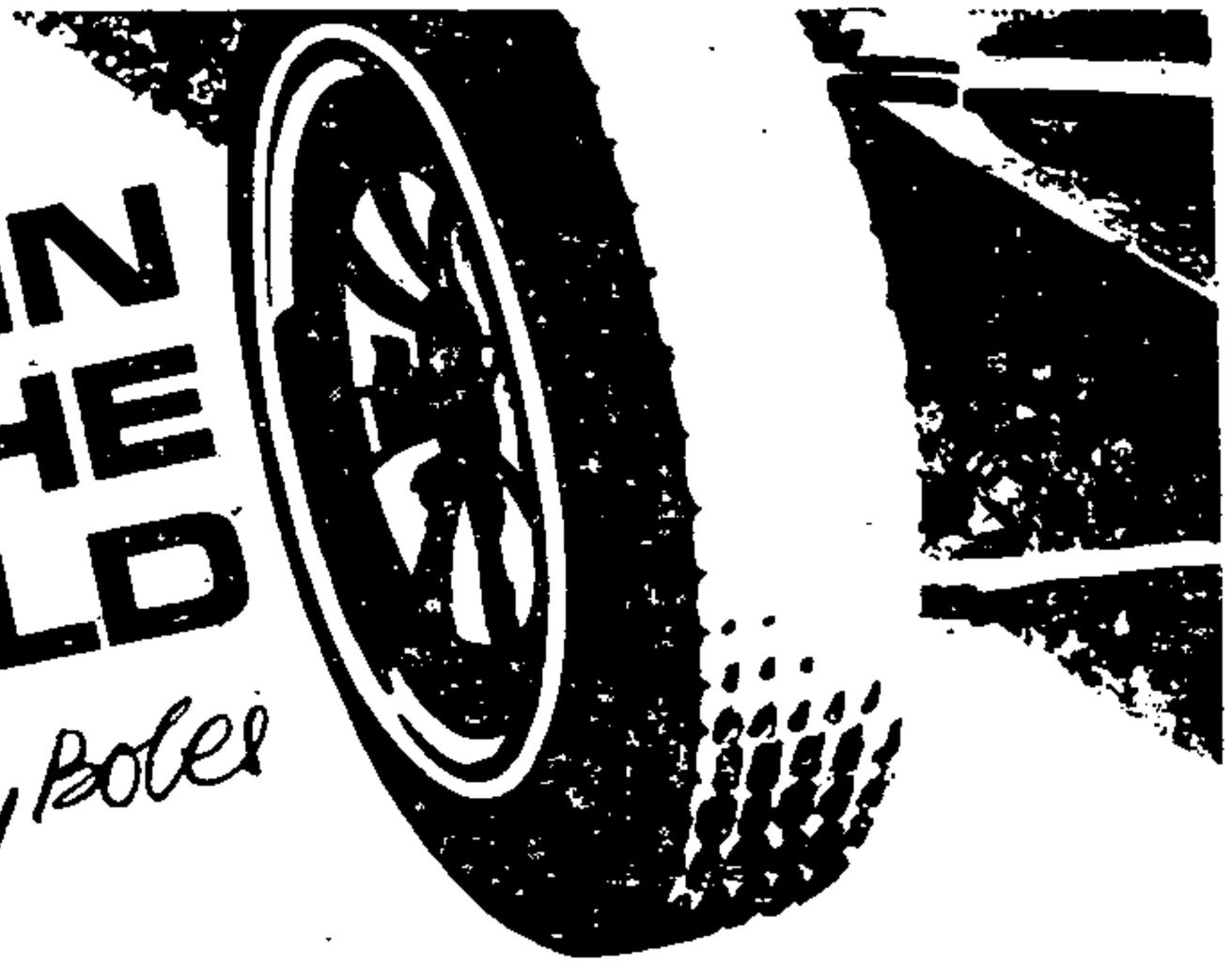
"You mean we go to the peasant *when* the ticket is won; and *before* the race in which we five participate," said Arito. He was our oldest, and fattest; he had eyelids like a lizard's. He shut those eyelids and smiled gently. His face was rich and dark, like a big pudding. "Just get your crooked facts straight, Truffi," he murmured. "Me, I like the idea. When it comes to that much money my backbone is a pillar of ectoplasm."

Truffi said, "Correct. All right, we guarantee a win for this peasant. That means we split six ways. Out of a lousy season—and my God, haven't we had a lousy season!—we gain a few roses."

His damn-everything eyes—like hot tar—raked us one by one. Nobody talked back. Here we were, the flower of

RACE IN THE WORLD

by Paul Darcy Boles



Italian racing, planning to trick humanity; trick our nation and the world. It had indeed been a terrible season, what with the rains, the national depression, and such things as Mussolini; they were events of God which a good honest racing driver should never have had to trouble his head about.

I nodded, and Truffi's eyebrows arched in two perfect caterpillars as he nodded back; he then looked over at Fione Fione—somehow he always resembled a flea, small, quick, somewhat wise—grinned. "I stand with Truffi."

D'Angelo fidgeted for a second under Truffi's eyes. Then D'Angelo, his face a thoughtful devil's—he was our youngest —coughed politely. "I stand with Truffi and," he jerked his head at me, "you, Castello, and you, Fione."

He looked sideways at Arito. "And you, Arito," he said. "Hey! That makes all of us!"

Then Arito belched for joy, everybody sat up higher, and everybody looked exactly what he was thinking: which was that it was a wonderful idea, an inspiration. We were all so broke. We were all such national heroes. We were all tired of giving blood for insufficient money. We were all thinking of the more than 100,000 American dollars, the full amount of the lottery's first prize, broken into good spending *lire,* and cut six ways. We shouted for the waiters and ordered and drank up with grace and enthusiasm. We put the bill for the drinks on Truffi's tab; it had been his idea.

That was in May; in June the drawings were held, and published in all the papers. We met in Truffi's kitchen, in his villa for which he was for ever a couple of months behind

on the rent. A nice place on a hill, nobody and nothing but trees around for acres.

We had a little trouble choosing the ticket winner we wished to bribe. Each of us, it turned out, wanted to bribe the person who held the ticket on *him*, personally; for a while each of us defended his choice, carefully pointing out in the newspaper photos the trustworthy lineaments of our man or woman. It struck us after a while—over the fifth bottle of *grappa*—that we *all* wanted to win. Even in a put-up job, we wanted to win. It was a singular revelation. Finally, we stirred the five names in a hat, blindfolded D'Angelo thickly, so he couldn't cheat, and had him pull the name. He pulled the name of the man who held a ticket on Truffi to win.

Immediately, Truffi's small chest—like a bantam rooster's—expanded about twelve inches, and he was ready to crow. How we envied him; all he had to do now was coast in, let us make it look hard for him, while we made it so easy. And he would get what we wouldn't—the same amount of money, yes; but the cheers, man, the cheers!

The name of the dodo who held Truffi's ticket was Stanguenetti, and his reproduction in the newspaper made him resemble a religious mongoose. He lived in a village about thirty kilometres out in the country. Next night, as the two who were supposed to be best with words and conviction, Fione and I drove down to call on this Stanguenetti.

He was a farmer; Rossellini could have made a great series of movies just from the smell of his boots.

Fione said mournfully, "A filthy year for the crops."

"A man can use more money, constantly," I said.

"God's truth, expressed with wit, Signore Castello," said Stanguenetti.

Fione said delicately, "Now your regal daughter whom we met a moment past, Stanguenetti, would she not like golden gowns, perfumes, a trip to Capri, perhaps even Paris?"

Stanguenetti picked at the fur in his nose. "What did the brat ever do for me? Now, look. What the hell are you here for? You're big-time drivers. You, Fione; you, Castello. Okay. I hold the ticket on Truffi. That adds up."

Fione sighed. "Move your boots just a little farther away, please. That's better . . . all right, Stanguenetti, the first point is, can you keep your mouth shut?"

It turned out that he could. This was the answer to every one of his prayers—that he could cheat the government which, as he put it, was being ruined swiftly by that wheat-shovelling

bastard, Mussolini, who made the trains run on time and made the working class a laugh for every worker; and at the same time, he could cash in hugely.

Just in the spirit of general good will, we also had him sign an ironclad secret contract—not quite in blood, though that's what we sweated—stating that the six-way split was understood by him, and that he was one hundred per cent for it. We figured if he tried to back out later, we could produce the document and threaten to drag him down with us.

On the way home, Fione driving, I said, "The working class of Italy is its lifeblood. You can depend on it in a pinch."

"Yes," Fione said, between his teeth, because he does not even like to talk while driving as a civilian, "*Viva* for him."

The race was July 18th. No rain; a perfect day. It burst over me like a great blossom the second I woke up. I rushed to the window and looked out. Already the boys on the motorcycles—in that city they come out of the cracks like ambitious roaches—were hitting one another and breaking up their machines down in front of the hotel. The officials were chasing them away from the roped-off part of the course. Some of the motorcycle boys were throwing bottles at the officials. Everything was very propitious.

I dressed quickly in my whites; the dazzle of the trousers, the blue stripe on the white shirt made me square my shoulders at myself in the mirror. "Come, Castello," I said. "Tonight you will be comparatively rich. And, barring acts of God, you will be alive. That is a new feeling."

I went so far as to do a small dance—an impromptu tarantella. When I stepped out into the hall, there was Truffi. He strutted mildly as we walked along. "How I slept," he said. "A baby couldn't do it. Dishonesty is healthy."

"True," I said. "But remember Dead Man's Corner. It is where we have our duel on the one-hundredth lap."

"Make me look good," he said. "Make yourself look fine, but me better. Quiet; now."

We had come out into the lobby. All the kids with their autograph books open came running up—about as many for me as for Truffi, I was glad to note. I squinted importantly, frowned, and signed my name with flourishes, thinking hard of my share of the money. Envy is for small men, and Truffi is smaller than I.

Photographers jumped around, blinding us. Reporters asked for statements. I said this was a solemn moment; Truffi said it was a noble challenge.

Out in the sun, I nudged Truffi and whispered, "I'll make it look marvellous, for the honour of the country."

"That's the correct spirit," Truffi told me. Then we were marching down a lane between people who with reluctance stepped back so we might get to the machines. I kept wanting to plant a kick on Truffi. I used forbearance.

D'Angelo trotted over from his machine. Soft-voiced, he said, "You son of a bitch, Truffi, if you crowd me—"

"Oh, I will have to do a little crowding," Truffi said. "Think of your bank account and yield. *I* will be thinking of your bank account also."

Biting his lip, D'Angelo walked away as Fione appeared beside us. He said, confidentially, "I have arranged to lose my steering wheel during the end of this thing. I will make it tremendous."

Truffi frowned with slight distaste. "Don't overact," he said. "Anything makes me sick, it's an act grabber. I am the star, this trip."

Cocking his eyes skywards, Fione said with softness, "I've been wondering . . . when we put those names in a hat, at your house—who held the hat?"

Truffi then spoke very loudly for the benefit of the people now clustering around: "And *I* wish *you* a great race as well, old comrade!"—and some damned fool cheered.

Slouching, doleful, appearing extremely baggy, Arito ambled over to us. He said, "I bet a little dough on myself. To make it look good. But hell, I'm the real favourite; I couldn't get decent odds."

Expansively, Truffi said, "I'll pay you back every cent you have invested in yourself."

Arito's sleepy eyes looked Truffi up and down. "You're insufferable," he said, and turned and oozed off.

Then the engines were being warmed, and you couldn't even hear the engines for the people, or see the grass for them. In the cockpit of my machine I checked everything. The rewards ahead kept jumping in front of my eyes; sliding coins and mint-new, crackling *lire*. From the corners of my eyes I could see Truffi on the left, D'Angelo on my right. I thought: It will be nice and will give that goddamned Truffi a jolt to let him worry a little bit. I will get a jump on him and let him stew a while. From D'Angelo's face I could tell he was thinking the same. Even *money* is no good unless you can get at least a tiny kick from making it.

Beyond D'Angelo, I could see part of Fione's head: an ear

and a cheekbone below the helmet. And then Arito's—just a slab of the jowl. No doubt they were thinking as I was.

The starter's flag came rippling down and everything moved.

You can never remember the jockeying at the start. You can only remember the point when you get out of it. And when something like position starts to show up. You can't hear anything over the engines and the crowd. D'Angelo came up fine in the small pack—five is nothing; it is a dream, a breeze—but I was just enough ahead of D'Angelo so he couldn't get first position. I had it.

In that city, on that course, you have to begin changing down and braking in a peculiar way at the first bend, if you wish to keep both your teeth and your position. It is done with rapidity. I cannot tell it as quickly as it is done. The feet move like a mad animal's. But they move correctly—heel and toe, brake, accelerator, so and so. The hands also are on fire. It is a good accustomed fire. Journalists do not write well of this and I don't blame them. Making love is comparable, but only when one is young and freshly inventive. Yet this thing goes on and Truffi is an old man, retired and happy, and I am, too. It is strange.

In the mirror I glimpsed Truffi back there. He seemed to be shouting unspeakable things. I turned for a whistling second and lifted my left hand from the steering wheel to thumb my nose at him. The body of my machine was pounding wonderfully. It wasn't as streamlined as they became later, but it would do. It was shaking my heart to jelly. The engine was giving fabulous response.

The first lap went like this: down through the city, all the city bends, the long straight past the three churches, with men and boys and young girls—charming girls even when seen in a flash—on the roofs and clinging to the steeples of two of the churches; then the ending of the lap, out into the country and back again and around and up on the narrow, shadowed stones between the buildings, and finally into sun flooding out before the hotel where we had started. On the far side of that first lap I looked into the mirror again. Hey-ho! Truffi had dropped back to fourth. Between me and that crazy rooster were D'Angelo and Fione. Trees went streaming by. It's nice country out there in the suburbs, very pleasant. Arito was just behind Truffi. In fact, Arito was really dogging it, which was, for Arito, miraculous.

Why was he dogging it, that fat calm man? Not until we

were past the hotel and into the first bend again, with my hands and feet and back muscles working for me and my brain off somewhere else, did I get another look at Truffi in my mirror. This time he was *much* farther back—a good six hundred metres. For the first time, I lifted my right foot—at a point on the course where I'd never ordinarily have done this in 10,000,000 years. D'Angelo drew up alongside me. I swung over towards him. We were two or two and a half inches apart. I could read his tachometer with clarity. He could read mine; they read the same.

I jerked a thumb backwards.

Nodding, D'Angelo shouted: "Trouble! His carburation!"

Simultaneously, Fione came up on my inboard side and hung there. He made a slight pass at me—this, for the benefit of people who were standing on, and hanging from, a tall rock just beside this section of the course. I responded with a modest pass at Fione.

Then, "What the hell?" Fione yelled wonderingly. "What's with Truffi?" With my face and my shoulders I told him I didn't know. Fione grimaced, called, "I'll keep pace a while—" and gunned on around D'Angelo and me.

I signalled D'Angelo to move ahead, too, and he gunned up just behind Fione. Now a glance in the mirror showed me Truffi even *farther* back and Arito, like somebody following a truck on a narrow road, right behind Truffi. What a lemon this was becoming!

They were both at least a thousand metres back. This was getting to be no contest. It was getting damned serious. Ahead, D'Angelo and Fione had slowed up once more, perhaps in sympathy and certainly because they were puzzled. We'd all cut down speed to about thirty kph. The one saving point was that we'd reached the countryside again. There weren't so many people out here. And we were heading into a stretch where there were *no* people; only a couple of cows in a field, chewing whatever they chew all day.

I braked hard, spun, corrected, braked again, and didn't spin out. I turned and waved to Truffi to stop. He did, masterfully; so did Arito, on his tail. For this breath of time there was no-one else but us in sight. Us and those cows. Ahead, I could hear D'Angelo and Fione drumming along; I could tell they had cut their speed even more. They were worried because we weren't yet in sight.

Shadows of roadside boulders cast gloom over Truffi and Arito and me as we got out for a swift conference.

Truffi exploded: "My God, this is embarrassing! My God, I hold my foot to the floorboards and nothing, nothing!"

Arito said with dark melancholy, "We should not simply stand here; somebody might see us. We might all be disqualified. Together. It's unfortunate; I was all set to buy this chicken farm, and—"

"This, that, and double it on your chicken farm," Truffi said. His ears were flaming and his strong nose had gone white. He gripped my shoulder. "Stand behind me, Cassy; you and Ritti and all of you. Now, you've *got* to. You've got to lose this goddamned race no matter what..." He wheeled around. "Ritti!" Arito was waddling towards Truffi's machine; by the time Truffi got to him, he had the bonnet up. Truffi howled. "What the screaming holy impossible are you *doing*?"

Very placidly, if with considerable worry, his chins shaking, Arito said, "I'm no mechanic...but I was thinking, if we could change carburettors—you take mine, I yours—"

Truffi very nearly blew across the landscape. Even the cows raised their ears. When he had finished blasting, Truffi yelled, "Quick, back in your machine, you weird, gross ape! Somebody is no doubt coming *right now*—they'll send an ambulance, we've been here long enough to grow beards... oh—my—God."

His great black eyes popped wide. Mine, too; and Arito's. Because here, from *behind*, came D'Angelo and Fione, running nearly neck and neck; they saw us in time to make loud rubber-stinking stops. The cows ran away across the pasture, udders flapping. The day was surely fine, small blue and white-and-gold flowers everywhere, much clover smell on the air. "Don't get out, they'll find us all stopped and *shoot* us," Truffi screamed, waving Fione and D'Angelo back into their cockpits.

Rather meditatively, Arito said, "We *could* change cars, but I imagine somebody would notice..."

From his cockpit D'Angelo called, "You bastard, you bastard Truffi! We've completely lapped you!" He was furious. "Think of Stanguenetti! Think of that poor farmer!"

Bringing a ghost of order among us, Fione shouted sternly: "They don't know we've lapped him. Now he has to *keep* in front, at all costs. *At all costs!* You and I, Angie, we stay here, we let Truffi go ahead and make a lap, then after that he *stays* ahead—all the way home!"

Of course, by *home* he meant for the rest of the race. My

jaw dropped. But it was not only practical, it was the only thing to do. The race was for a hundred and fifteen laps. Shutting my mouth, I ran for my car; Truffi bounded into his; Arito, like a brown bear in deep thought, scratched his behind as he settled himself in his mount. In a cloud of blue exhaust smoke, his engine truly coughing now, the machine bucking a trifle, Truffi set off ahead of us. He vanished from sight around the bend very slowly. Arito gunned his engine.

I said, "Shut up, Ritti!" He stopped the gunning, and then, again, we could all hear Truffi's car spitting its way around. It would surely make a resplendent sight, creeping past the hotel.

D'Angelo, who must have been doing some figuring, called to me, "Cassy, it would be more natural if you and Ritti showed up behind him. Just don't get too close. *You* don't have to lose *another* lap; just Fione and I have to stay here."

I said okay, and gave the nod to Arito, and we put our machines in gear and pulled off. It couldn't have been more than a few seconds before we came up alongside Truffi, one on each flank. Truffi was staring straight ahead; his knuckles seemed stark white on his steering wheel.

None of us was going fast enough to limit any understandable conversation.

Leaning out a bit, I said, "Look, Truffi, it's not so rotten—at the pit maybe you can get a new carb; or something..."

I felt quite bad about him, you know. He was so cocky, and you hate to see the feathers lie flat.

In a voice he managed to keep fairly low, just over the coughing of his engine, Truffi said, "It is more than the so-and-so, unspeakable carb." His big jaw was out a foot. He didn't trust himself to look at me. Now and then he lifted both hands from the steering wheel and slapped his own ears. "The whole machine feels generically unsound. It's coming apart in unison, Cassy. All we can do—"

At length, then, he turned around to face me. This didn't matter; if he'd hit something, nobody would have been hurt; jostled, but not shaken. He looked like the world's end, concentrated. "All we can *do*—" Truffi choked. We were now coming out of the country stretch, from the pastures and trees into the populous part. Ahead, people wedged along the roadside tighter than fence posts, tighter than olive stones in olives. Truffi's voice broke. "All we can do is pretend everything is *fine*." And then he was grinning, hard, for the people along the road. We could have reached out and

shaken hands with these people. We could have talked a little; inquired about their health, their families.

All of them stayed very hushed, wondering, awed, as we went by. The three of us grinned and stared directly in front of us. Truffi was slightly in the lead. It was all very sedate.

Truffi's pit stop didn't help. Very shortly after he limped into his pit, Arito and I headed into ours. Then D'Angelo and Fione came very carefully around and with caution drove into *their* pits. All five of us, in the pits . . . my mechanics looked at me wide-eyed, as if the world had gone brutally mad. I said, "Work slow. Truffi's going to be in his pit for a while."

My oldest mechanic, Tiponi, craned around to inspect me and said, "Concussion. You have been grievously whacked."

I said, "I've got this one in the bag, you fool. Work *slow*. I need time to breathe in."

Tiponi threw his wrench down. It bounced quite a lot.

"You need time to breathe, *maèstro*. You need it to what? To sleep?"

He turned around and went away. I didn't see him till much later; it was years before he began to trust me again.

The crowds, mothers and fathers and children, lovers and aunts, uncles and babies and cats, were absolutely quiet as we all came out of the pits. The signal for us to do this was Truffi, crawling out ahead of us, obviously in no better condition than before. We would never dare to pass him. For, if we passed him, we would never be able to lessen our speed enough to let him catch up and pass *us*. As we came out I could see small knots of officials arguing wildly. Five of us in the pits *together* . . . a clump of three, then another two joining the first three . . . now all five leaving together . . . it was a case to make any official head spin, the blood rise.

Quietly we navigated out of the city, into the suburbs, through the countryside. I managed to find a cigarette and light it. It was small trouble, there was no true wind stream.

We were strung out now in a careful line. We passed a group carrying lunch baskets over its collective arms. There were seven; each man in his Sunday best, the women in shining black with shawls and headscarves. As we passed they ceased to eat; bread, wine hung in the air; they gaped. Their heads turned slowly to follow us. That was all. I could feel their eyes on the back of my neck for a long time.

Behind me, that round, sound driver Arito said, "There's a donkey cart. I think I can hit it."

It was something one might have prayed for—a donkey cart, its driver oblivious to the fact that the course was closed to other traffic. No doubt he lived down a side lane. Arito and I—and the others behind us—half stood and watched while Truffi went sneaking, closer and closer, to the cart's rear wheels. The donkey's hoofs made a gentle noise in the dust. The driver, asleep, slept on.

Standing in his cockpit, Truffi remarked to the cart with a kind of anguished politeness, "Move aside, please. We're racing."

Waking, the driver veered around, blinked, and said, "Naturally, *signori*." He clucked to the donkey, which changed its course a trifle and kept on. Then, for a while, it was touch and go—but Truffi was in luck; it was level ground with no hills, and at length he managed to pass. From the back, Truffi appeared a shade more like himself, a shade cockier; it was the first moving thing he had passed for some time. The back of his neck had more rigidity, and he waved to us with triumph.

"Now, hit it," I said to Arito. "Not with violence. And afterwards, be sure to get the man's name—so full restitution can be made."

With huge dignity, Arito grunted, drove around me and advanced upon the cart. He was within a few inches, judging his point of contact nicely, when the driver came erect again and protested: "You will strike me!"

Hands off the steering wheel, palms spread widely, Arito shrugged.

The driver whipped up the donkey. He also caused it to trot towards the opposite side of the road. Arito, enjoying this challenge, immediately changed direction, and the driver, glancing back, changed *his* direction again. A dozen times the two, Arito and the donkey driver, zigged, zagged and zigged—until at last, with a satisfying though humble crunch, Arito managed the job. Then the donkey stopped, and Arito said with fat gladness, "You've crushed my radiator." He got out; the driver of the cart descended. The last I saw, they were talking with easy animation, perhaps about the weather.

Then D'Angelo developed spark-plug difficulty. He developed it by stopping, getting out, lifting his bonnet and disconnecting two plugs. Later, he said it helped him monstrously. It gave his engine a cough and stutter, as though it had developed some fabulous mechanical tuberculosis.

As for Fione, at the two-hundredth lap he shut his eyes

and casually, with immense flair, drove off through a fence, into a field inhabited only by several sheep and singing larks, and went on driving until his machine rolled down a moderate slope and came to rest in an even more moderate creek—depth, two inches. He was saved from drowning by a party of drinkers, too far gone to hate us all, who had, through opera glasses, observed the debacle; they fed him and gave him spirits to keep him in fighting trim as they hauled him off in the race ambulance, which at this time made its only appearance of the day.

During the same lap, and after Fione had left us for the duration, I drew level with Truffi on the country stretch and said evilly, "It was at Dead Man's Corner you reminded me to duel. There, we'll duel."

Just ahead lay the bend in question; we were negotiating it a moment later at a pace that let me see each sparkle of mica in the rock which stood in the bend's right-hand side.

Truffi sighed. "Fifteen laps left. Will they stone us, do you think?"

"It's a possibility," I said.

Presently he said, "Thank God there are no American or British journalists handy. Thank God our glorious dictator kept this one in the country. Cassy, I am sorry my greed did this to us."

I reached out and patted his shoulder; he needed it. "Not alone yours, Truffi. Ours. And we share that, too."

Then I rolled ahead of him, pulled hard right, and at approximately ten kph, hit the mammoth rock. It gave me a dent, nothing worse. So I was forced to drive off the course and seek out a better rock, which took off my sump.

That evening the hotel lights shone joyous and welcoming. But as we five walked in, fresh from the incredibly stiff ceremony of cup-giving, no men crowded forward to shake my hand or any of our hands. No woman warm with the need to sleep with a courageous driver came towards me. Even children stared with chill and cocked their noses. Little Fione said, "I am dispossessed. Goddamn it, at my age, after all I've done..."

Then two things gave me a whisper of cheer. One was Stanguenetti, who winked and leered from around a lobby column. The other was the gorgeous young woman, sleek as new wheat and gowned by some flesh-loving Tintoretto, who strode up and took Truffi's hand and whispered something into

his ear. He excused himself and walked off with her. Watching them go, or rather watching her go, I thought there was something familiar about the sumptuous rear of the lady. But I could not quite place it.

For a few days after that we were more or less barricaded, then the summons came—not from Mussolini, but from another high official. We were escorted to his state chambers. He had a forceful moustache, a sign of privilege—Mussolini didn't like moustaches.

As soon as we were seated, another door opened and Stanguenetti came in. After him came the girl who had tapped Truffi for honours the night of the race. As Truffi sat up, frowning and alert as a nervous horse, I recognised her. It was Stanguenetti's daughter—Fione and I had seen her, very briefly, the night we made plots with that larcenous farmer. She hadn't, then, looked like *this* . . . suddenly a vicious, bad thought came to me, and I nudged Truffi.

"Truffi," I hissed, "you spent a night with this." He nodded. "In your pocket," I went on, "you had a sacrosanct document. The one Fione and I made Stanguenetti sign, so he could never, with grace, withdraw from our six-way bargain. Truffi, where *is* that contract?"

"The damnedest thing," he whispered. "She wouldn't take any *money* . . ."

I went pale. I hardly needed to hear the official when he began, quite smoothly, telling us that Signor Stanguenetti had, in light of the questionable circumstances surrounding the race, and because of his intense patriotism, decided to split his winnings fifty-fifty with the nation. The official was in it with the Stanguenettis up to his fat neck, but even so, that left the Stanguenettis, father and daughter, with plenty. I think I felt worst while we all posed, Stanguenetti's hairy arm around my shoulders, for the newspaper photographers. When the Stanguenettis had gone, the official gave us his blessing and let us go, and we five slunk off to our table in a corner of the plaza. We sat looking at Truffi for a long time, then fat Arito laughed.

"I hope she was good," he said. "Not your fault, really. You'd never seen her before. But by God, I hope she was worth our money, all of it. Was she?"

Truffi reflected. "Yes, pretty good. You know, I've had worse." Then we all laughed, there being little else to do, and ordered drinks; we put them on Truffi's tab.

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GALLERY OF GREATS

SO YOU WON'T TALK

BY DAMON RUNYON

IT is along about two o'clock of a nippy Tuesday morning, and I am sitting in Mindy's Restaurant on Broadway with Regret, the horse player, speaking of this and that, when who comes in but Ambrose Hammer, the newspaper scribe, and what is he carrying in one hand but a big birdcage, and what is in this birdcage but a green parrot.

Well, if anybody sits around Mindy's Restaurant long enough, they are bound to see some interesting and unusual scenes, but this is undoubtedly the first time that anybody cold sober ever witnesses a green parrot in there, and Mindy himself is by no means enthusiastic about this spectacle.

In fact, as Ambrose Hammer places the cage on our table, and sits down beside me, Mindy approaches us and says to Ambrose, "Horse players, yes," Mindy says. "Wrong betters, yes. Dogs and song writers and actors, yes. But parrots," Mindy says, "no. Take it away," he says.

But Ambrose Hammer pays no attention to Mindy and starts ordering a few delicacies of the season from Schmalz, the waiter, and Mindy finally sticks his finger in the cage to scratch the parrot's head, and goes *cootch-cootch-cootch*, and the next thing anybody knows, Mindy is sucking his finger and yelling bloody murder, as it seems the parrot starts munching on the finger as if it is a *Pretzel*.

Mindy is quite vexed indeed, and he says he will go out and borrow a Betsy off of Officer Gloon and blow the parrot's brains out, and he also says that if anybody will make it worth his while, he may blow Ambrose Hammer's brains out, too.

"If you commit such a deed," Ambrose says, "you will be arrested. I mean, blowing this parrot's brains out. This parrot is a material witness in a murder case."

Well, this statement puts a different phase on the matter, and Mindy goes away speaking to himself, but it is plain to be seen that his feelings are hurt as well as his finger, and personally, if I am Ambrose Hammer, I will not eat anything in Mindy's again unless I have somebody taste it first.

Naturally, I am very curious to know where Ambrose Hammer gets the parrot, as he is not such a character as makes a practice of associating with the birds and beasts of the forest, but of course I do not ask any questions, as the best you can get from asking questions along Broadway is a reputation for asking questions. And of course I am wondering what Ambrose Hammer means by saying this parrot is a material witness in a murder case, although I know that Ambrose is always mixing himself up in murder cases, even when they are really none of his put-in. Ambrose's hobby is murder cases.

He is a short, pudgy character, of maybe thirty, with a round face and googly eyes, and he is what is called a dramatic critic on one of the morning blatters, and his dodge is to observe new plays such as people are always putting on in the theatres and to tell his readers what he thinks of these plays.

In fact, Ambrose claims the new plays are what drive him to an interest in murder for relief. So he is always looking into crimes of this nature, especially if they are mysterious cases, and trying to solve these mysteries, and between doing this and telling what he thinks of the new plays, Ambrose finds his time occupied no little, and quite some.

He is a well-known character along Broadway, because he is always in and out, and up and down, and around and about, but to tell the truth, Ambrose is not so popular with the citizens around Mindy's, because they figure that a character who likes to solve murder mysteries must have a slight touch of copper in him which will cause him to start investigating other mysteries at any minute.

Furthermore, there is a strong knockout on Ambrose in many quarters because he is in love with Miss Dawn Astra, a very beautiful young Judy who is playing the part of a strip dancer in a musical show at the Summer Garden, and it is well known to one and all that Miss Dawn Astra is the sweet pea of a character by the name of Julius Smung, until Ambrose comes into her life, and that Julius' heart is slowly breaking.

This Julius Smung is a sterling young character of maybe

twenty-two, who is in the taxicab business as a driver. He is the son of the late Wingy Smung, who has his taxi stand in front of Mindy's from 1922 down to the night in 1936 that he is checking up the pockets of a sailor in Central Park to see if the sailor has the right change for his taxi fare, and the sailor wakes up and strikes Wingy on the head with Wingy's own jack handle, producing concussion of the brain.

Well, when Wingy passes away, leaving behind him many sorrowing friends, his son Julius takes his old stand, and naturally all who know Wingy in life are anxious to see his son carry on his name.

He is a good-looking young character and quite energetic, and he is most courteous to one and all, except maybe sailors, consequently public sentiment is on his side when Ambrose Hammer moves in on him with Miss Dawn Astra, especially as she is Julius Smung's sweet pea since way back.

Their romance is regarded as one of the most beautiful little romances ever seen in this town. In fact, there is some talk that Julius Smung and Miss Dawn Astra will one day get married.

Then Ambrose Hammer observes Miss Dawn Astra playing the part of a strip dancer, and it is undoubtedly love at first sight on Ambrose's part, and he expresses his love by giving Miss Dawn Astra better write-ups in the blatter he works for than he ever gives Miss Katharine Cornell, or even Mr. Noel Coward. In fact, to read what Ambrose Hammer says about Miss Dawn Astra, you will think that she is a wonderful artist.

Naturally, Miss Dawn Astra reciprocates Ambrose Hammer's love, because all the time she is Julius Smung's sweet pea, the best she ever gets is a free taxi ride now and then, and Julius seldom speaks of her as an artist. To tell the truth, Julius is always beefing about her playing the part of a strip dancer, as he claims it takes her too long to get her clothes back on when he is waiting outside the Summer Garden for her, and the chances are Ambrose Hammer is a pleasant change to Miss Dawn Astra as Ambrose does not care if she never gets her clothes on.

Anyway, Miss Dawn Astra starts going around and about with Ambrose Hammer, and Julius Smung is so downcast over this matter that he scarcely knows what he is doing. In fact, inside of three weeks, he runs through traffic lights twice on Fifth Avenue, and once he almost drives his taxi off the Queensboro Bridge with three passengers in it, although it comes out afterwards that Julius thinks the passengers may be

newspaper scribes, and nobody has the heart to blame him for this incident.

There is much severe criticism of Ambrose Hammer among the citizens around Mindy's Restaurant, as they feel he is away out of line in moving in on Julius Smung's sweet pea, when any one of a hundred other Judys in this town will do him just as well and cause no suffering to anybody, but Ambrose pays no attention to this criticism.

Ambrose says he is very much in love with Miss Dawn Astra, and he says that, besides, taxicab drivers get the best of it in this town as it is, although it is no secret that Ambrose never gets into a taxi after he moves in on Julius Smung without first taking a good look at the driver to make sure that he is not Julius.

Well, by the time it takes me to explain all this, Miss Dawn Astra comes into Mindy's, and I can see at once that Ambrose Hammer is not to blame for being in love with her, and neither is Julius Smung, for she is undoubtedly very choice indeed. She is one of these tall, limber Judys, with a nice expression in her eyes and a figure such as is bound to make anybody dearly love to see Miss Dawn Astra play the part of a strip dancer.

Naturally, the first thing that attracts Miss Dawn Astra's attention when she sits down at the table with us is the parrot in the cage, and she says to Ambrose, "Why, Ambrose," she says, "where does the parrot come from?"

"This parrot is a material witness," Ambrose says. "Through this parrot I will solve the mystery of the murder of the late Mr. Grafton Wilton."

Well, at this, Miss Dawn Astra seems to turn a trifle pale around the gills, and she lets out a small gasp and says, "Grafton Wilton?" she says. "Murdered?" she says. "When and where and how?"

"Just a few hours ago," Ambrose says. "In his apartment on Park Avenue. With a blunt instrument. This parrot is in the room at the time. I arrive ten minutes after the police. There is a small leopard there, too, also a raccoon and a couple of monkeys and several dogs.

"The officers leave one of their number to take care of these creatures," Ambrose says. "He is glad to let me remove the parrot, because he does not care for birds. He does not realise the importance of this parrot. In fact," Ambrose says, "this officer is in favour of me removing all the livestock except the monkeys, which he plans to take home to his

children, but," Ambrose says, "this parrot is all I require."

Well, I am somewhat surprised to hear this statement, as I am acquainted with Grafton Wilton, and in fact he is well known to one and all along Broadway as a young character who likes to go about spending the money his papa makes.

This Grafton Wilton is by no means an odious character, but he is considered somewhat unusual in many respects, and in fact, if his family does not happen to have about twenty million dollars, there is no doubt but what Grafton will be placed under observation long ago. But of course nobody in this town is going to place anybody with a piece of twenty million under observation.

This Grafton Wilton is quite a nature lover, and he is fond of walking into spots leading a wild animal of some description on a chain, or with a baboon sitting on his shoulder, and once he appears in the 9-9 Club carrying a young skunk in his arms, which creates some ado among the customers.

I am really somewhat depressed to hear of Grafton Wilton being murdered, and I am sitting there wondering who will replace him in the community, when all of a sudden Miss Dawn Astra says, "I hate parrots," she says.

"So do I," I say. "Ambrose," I say, "why do you not bring us the leopard? I am very fond of leopards."

"Anyway," Miss Dawn Astra says, "how can a parrot be a material witness to anything, especially such a thing as a murder?"

"Look," Ambrose says. "Whoever kills Grafton Wilton must be on very friendly terms with him, because every indication is that Grafton and the murderer sit around the apartment all evening, eating and drinking. And," Ambrose says, "anybody knows that Grafton is always a very solitary character, and he seldom has anybody around him in any circumstances. So it is a cinch he is not entertaining a stranger in his apartment for hours.

"Grafton has two servants," Ambrose says. "A butler, and his wife. He permits them to take the day off to go to Jersey to visit relatives. Grafton and his visitor wait on themselves. A private elevator that the passenger operates runs to Grafton's apartment. No-one around the building sees the visitor arrive or depart.

"In the course of the evening," Ambrose says, "the visitor strikes Grafton down with a terrific blow from some blunt instrument and leaves him on the floor, dead. The deceased has two black eyes and a badly-lacerated nose. The servants

find the body when they arrive home late tonight. The weapon is missing. There are no strange fingerprints anywhere around the apartment."

"It sounds like a very mysterious mystery, to be sure," I say. "Maybe it is a stick-up, and Grafton Wilton resists."

"No," Ambrose says, "there is no chance that robbery is the motive. There is a large sum of money in Grafton's pockets, and thousands of dollars' worth of valuables scattered around, and nothing is touched."

"But where does the parrot come in?" Miss Dawn Astra says.

"Well," Ambrose says, "if the murderer is well known to Grafton Wilton, the chances are his name is frequently mentioned by Grafton during the evening, in the presence of this parrot. Maybe it is Sam. Maybe it is Bill or Frank or Joe. It is bound to be the name of some male character," Ambrose says, "because no female can possibly strike such a powerful blow as causes the death of Grafton Wilton.

"Maybe Grafton Wilton makes an outcry when he is struck down, such as 'Oh, Henry,' or, 'Oh, George.' This is bound to impress the name on the parrot's mind," Ambrose says.

Naturally, after hearing Ambrose's statement, the parrot becomes of more interest to me, and I examine the bird in the cage closely.

It just sits there on the perch in the cage, rolling its eyes this way and that and now and then going *awk-awk-awk*, as parrots will do, in a low tone of voice, and of course nobody can make anything of these subdued remarks.

"The poor thing is sleepy," Ambrose says. "I will now take it home with me. I must never let it out of my sight or hearing," he says, "as it may utter the name at any moment out of a clear sky, and I must be present when this comes off."

"But you promise to take me to the Ossified Club," Miss Dawn Astra says.

"Tut-tut!" Ambrose says. "Tut-tut-tut," he says. "My goodness, how can you think of frivolity when I have a big murder mystery to solve? Besides, I cannot go to the Ossified Club unless I take the parrot, and I am sure it will be greatly bored there. Come to think of it," Ambrose says, "I will be greatly bored myself. You run along home."

Personally, I feel that Ambrose speaks rather crisply to Miss Dawn Astra, and I can see that she is somewhat offended as she departs, and I am by no means surprised the next day when Regret, the horse player, tells me that he sees somebody——

that looks very much like Miss Dawn Astra riding on the front seat of Julius Smung's taxicab.

Naturally, all the blatters make quite a fuss over the murder of Grafton Wilton, because it is without doubt one of the best murders for them that takes place in this town in a long time, what with the animals in the apartment, and all this and that, and the police are also somewhat excited about the matter until they discover there is no clue, and no motive.

Well, the next night Ambrose Hammer has to go to a theatre to see the opening of another new play, and nothing will do but he must take the parrot in the cage to the theatre with him, and as nobody is expecting a dramatic critic to bring a parrot with him to an opening, Ambrose escapes notice going in.

It seems that it is such an opening as always draws the best people, and furthermore it is a very serious play, and Ambrose sets the cage with the parrot in it on the floor between his legs. Then all of a sudden the parrot starts going *awk-awk-awk* in a very loud tone of voice indeed, and flapping its wings and attracting general attention to Ambrose Hammer.

Well, Ambrose tries to soothe the parrot by saying *shush-shush* to it, but the parrot will not shush, and in fact, it keeps on going *awk-awk* louder than ever, and presently there are slight complaints from the people around Ambrose, and finally the leading character in the play comes down off the stage and says he can see that Ambrose is trying to give him the bird in a subtle manner, and that he has a notion to punch Ambrose.

The ushers request Ambrose to either check the parrot in the cloakroom or leave the theatre, and Ambrose says he will leave. Ambrose says he already sees enough of the play to convince him that it is unworthy of his further attention, and he claims afterwards that as he goes up the aisle with the birdcage in his hand he is stopped by ten different theatre-goers, who say they're sorry they haven't parrots.

This incident attracts some little attention, and it seems that the editor of the blatter that Ambrose works for tells him that it is undignified for a dramatic critic to go to the theatre with a parrot, so Ambrose comes into Mindy's with the parrot again and informs me that I must take charge of the parrot on nights when he has to go to the theatre.

Ambrose says he will pay me well for this service, and as I am always willing to pick up a few dibs, I do not object, although personally, I am by no means a parrot fan. Ambrose says I am to keep a notebook, so I can jot down anything the

parrot says when it is with me, and when I ask Ambrose what it says to date, Ambrose admits that so far it does not say a thing but *awk*.

"In fact," Ambrose says, "I am commencing to wonder if the cat has got its tongue. It is the most noncommittal parrot I ever see in all my life."

So now I am the custodian of the parrot the next night Ambrose has to go to the theatre, and every time the parrot opens its trap, I out with my notebook and jot down its remarks, but I only wind up with four pages of *awks*.

I can see Ambrose is somewhat on edge. I figure it may be because he is not seeing as much of Miss Dawn Astra as formerly, as it seems Miss Dawn Astra will not go around with the parrot, and Ambrose at the moment will not go around without it.

I run into Miss Dawn Astra in the street a couple of times, and she always asks me if the parrot says anything as yet, and when I tell her nothing but *awk*, it seems to make her quite happy, so I judge she figures that Ambrose is bound to get tired of listening to nothing but *awk* and will return to her.

Well, the third night I am in charge of the parrot I leave it in my room in the hotel where I reside in West Forty-ninth Street, as I learn from Big Tig, the dice shooter, that a small game is in progress in a garage in Fifty-fourth Street.

But when I return to the room after winning a sawbuck in two passes in the game, I am horrified to find no parrot.

The cage is still there, but the gate is open, and so is a window in the room, and it is plain to be seen that the parrot manages to unhook the fastening of the gate and make its escape, and personally I will be very much pleased if I do not remember about Ambrose Hammer and think how bad he will feel over losing the parrot.

So I hasten at once to a little bird store over in Eighth Avenue, where they have parrots by the peck, and I am fortunate to find the proprietor just closing up for the night and willing to sell me a green parrot for twelve dollars, which takes in the tenner I win in the dice game and my night's salary from Ambrose Hammer for looking after his parrot.

Personally, I do not see much difference between the parrot I buy and the one that gets away, and the proprietor of the bird store tells me that the new parrot is a pretty good talker.

Well, I carry the new parrot back to my room in a little wooden cage that the proprietor says goes with it and put it in the big cage, and then I meet Ambrose Hammer at Mindy's

Restaurant and tell him that the parrot says nothing worthy of note during the evening.

I am afraid Ambrose may notice that this is not the same old parrot, but he does not even glance at the bird.

Up to this time the new parrot does not say as much as *awk*. It is sitting in the little swing in the cage rocking back and forth, and the chances are it is doing some thinking, too, because all of a sudden it lets out a yell and speaks as follows:

"Big heel! Big heel! Big heel!"

Well, at this, three characters at tables in different parts of the room approach Ambrose and wish to know what he means by letting his parrot insult them, and it takes Ambrose several minutes to chill these beefs. In the meantime, he is trying to think which one of Grafton Wilton's acquaintances the parrot may have reference to, though he finally comes to the conclusion that there is no use trying to single out anyone.

But Ambrose is greatly pleased that the parrot at last displays a disposition to talk, and he says it will not be long now before the truth comes out, and that he is glad of it, because he wishes to renew his companionship with Miss Dawn Astra.

From now on, Ambrose is around and about with the parrot every night, and the parrot talks a blue streak at all times, though it never mentions any names, except bad names. In fact, it mentions so many bad names that the female characters who frequent the restaurants and night clubs where Ambrose takes the parrot commence complaining to the managements that they may as well stay home.

Of course I never tell Ambrose that the parrot he is taking around with him is not the parrot he thinks it is, because the way I look at it, he is getting more out of my parrot than he does out of the original, although I am willing to bet plenty that my parrot does not solve any murder mysteries.

Now one night when Ambrose is to go to a theatre to witness another new play, and I am to have charge of the parrot for a while, he takes me to dinner with him at the 9-9 Club, which is a restaurant that is patronised by some of the highest-class parties, male and female, in this town.

As usual, Ambrose has the parrot with him in its cage, and although it is plain to be seen that the headwaiter does not welcome the parrot, he does not care to offend Ambrose, so he gives us a nice table against the wall, and as we sit down, Ambrose seems to notice a strange-looking young Judy who is at the next table all by herself.

She is all in black, and she has cold-looking black hair slicked down tight on her head and parted in the middle, and a cold eye, and a cold-looking, dead-white face, and Ambrose seems to think he knows her.

So Ambrose puts the birdcage on the settee between him and the cold-looking Judy and orders our dinner, and we sit there speaking of this and that, but I observe that now and then Ambrose takes a sneak-peek at her as if he is trying to remember who she is. She pays no attention to him whatever, and she does not pay any attention to the parrot alongside her either, although everybody else in the 9-9 Club is looking our way and, the chances are, making remarks about the parrot.

Well, now what happens but the head waiter brings a messenger boy over to our table, and this messenger boy has a note which is addressed to Ambrose Hammer, and Ambrose opens this note and reads it, then hands the note to me.

Dear Ambrose,

When you receive this Julius and I will be on our way to South America where we will be married and raise up a family. Ambrose I love Julius and will never be happy with anybody else. We are leaving so suddenly because we are afraid it may come out about Julius calling on Mr. Grafton the night of the murder to demand an apology from him for insulting me which I never tell you about Ambrose because I do not wish you to know about me often going to Mr. Grafton's place as you are funny that way. They have a big fight and Ambrose Julius is sorry he kills Mr. Wilton.

Ambrose pardon me for taking your parrot but I tell Julius what you say about the parrot speaking the name of the murderer some day and it worries Julius. He says he hears parrots have long memories, and he is afraid it may remember his name although Julius only mentions it once when he is introducing himself to Mr. Wilton to demand the apology. I tell him he is thinking of elephants but he says it is best to be on the safe side so I take the parrot out of the hotel and you will find your parrot in the bottom of the East River Ambrose and thanks for everything.

Dawn

P.S. Ambrose kindly do not tell it around about Julius killing Mr. Wilton as we do not wish any publicity about this. D

Well, Ambrose is sitting there as if he is practically stunned, and shaking his head this way and that, and I am feeling very

sorry for him indeed, because I can understand what a shock it is to anybody to lose somebody they dearly love without notice.

Furthermore, I can see that presently Ambrose will be seeking explanations about the parrot matter, but for maybe five minutes Ambrose does not say a word, and then he speaks as follows, "What really hurts," Ambrose says, "is to see my theory go wrong. Here I am going around thinking it is somebody in Grafton Wilton's own circle that commits this crime, and the murderer turns out to be nothing but a taxicab driver.

"Furthermore, I make a laughing stock of myself thinking a parrot will one day utter the name of the murderer. By the way," Ambrose says, "what does this note say about the parrot?"

Well, I can see that this is where it all comes out, but just as I am about to hand him the note and start my own story, all of a sudden the parrot in the cage begins speaking in a loud tone of voice as follows, "Hello, Polly," the parrot says. "Hello, Pretty Polly."

Now I often hear the parrot make these remarks and I pay no attention to it, but Ambrose Hammer turns at once to the cold-looking Judy at the table next to him and bows to her most politely, and says to her like this: "Of course," he says. "To be sure," he says. "Pretty Polly. Pretty Polly Oligant," he says. "I am not certain at first, but now I remember. Well, well, well," Ambrose says. "Two years in Auburn, if I recall, for trying to put the shake on Grafton Wilton on a phony breach-of-promise matter in 1932, when he is still under age.

"Strange I forget it for a while," Ambrose says. "Strange I do not connect you with this thing marked *P*, that I pick up in the apartment the night of the murder. I think maybe I am protecting some female character of good repute."

And with this, Ambrose pulls a small gold cigarette-case out of his pocket that he never mentions to me before, and shows it to her.

"He ruins my life," the cold-looking Judy says. "The breach-of-promise suit is on the level, no matter what the jury says. How can you beat millions of dollars? There is no justice in this world," she says.

Her voice is so low that no-one but Ambrose and me can hear her, and her cold eyes have a very strange expression to be sure as she says, "I kill Grafton Wilton, all right," she says. "I am glad of it, too. I am just getting ready to go to the

police and give myself up, anyway, so I may as well tell you. I am sick and tired of living with this thing hanging over me."

"I never figure a Judy," Ambrose says. "I do not see how a female can strike a blow hard enough to kill such a sturdy character as Grafton Wilton."

"Oh, that," she says. "I do not strike him a blow. I get into his apartment with a duplicate key that I have made from his lock, and I find him lying on the floor half conscious. I revive him, and he tells me a taxicab driver comes to his apartment and smashes him between the eyes with his fist when he opens the door, and Grafton claims he does not know why. Anyway," she says, "the blow does not do anything more serious to him than give him a couple of black eyes.

"Grafton is glad to see me," she says. "We sit around talking and eating and listening to the radio all evening. In fact," she says, "we have such an enjoyable time that it is five hours later before I have the heart and the opportunity to slip a little cyanide in a glass of wine on him."

"Well," I say, "the first thing we must do is to look up Miss Dawn Astra's address and notify her that she is all wrong about Julius doing the job. Maybe," I say, "she will feel so relieved that she will return to you, Ambrose."

"No," Ambrose says. "I can see that Miss Dawn Astra is not the one for me. If there is anything I cannot stand it is a female character who does not state the truth at all times, and Miss Dawn Astra utters a prevarication in this note when she says my parrot is at the bottom of the East River, for here it is right here in this cage, and a wonderful bird it is, to be sure. Let us all now proceed to the police station, and I will then hasten to the office and write my story of this transaction, and never mind about the new play."

"Hello, Polly," the parrot says. "Pretty Polly."

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SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD (DECEMBER ISSUE)

Across. 1, *Pistol.* 4, *Acanthus.* 9, *Nodded.* 10, *Specious.* 12, *Rows.* 13, *Heard.* 14, *Glee.* 17, *Milk-and-water.* 20, *Schoolmaster.* 23, *Agog.* 24, *Strip.* 25, *Trig.* 28, *Mandarin.* 29, *Region.* 30, *Noblesse.* 31, *Frugal.*

Down. 1, *Panorama.* 2, *Sidewalk.* 3, *Omen.* 5, *Capercailzie.* 6, *Nice.* 7, *Hoop-la.* 8, *Sestet.* 11, *Heads or tails.* 15, *March.* 16, *Sepal.* 18, *Starling.* 19, *Original.* 21, *Carmen.* 22, *Hob-nob.* 26, *Mace.* 27, *Bear.*

Thunder slammed through the hall but her fear was ebbing — or was it?

NEIGHBOURS

by

ROBERT COOVER

IT'S the umbrella!" Martha shouted over her shoulder. "Can't get it to close!" Fingers cold and the rain-sky lit and thunder cracked. "Good heavens!" she cried. She was trembling slightly.

At her back, Carl Lund spoke softly. "Let me help." And he reached around her with his strong hand, but just at that moment, the umbrella collapsed.

"At last!" said Martha triumphantly. She shook the umbrella, then turned to face him. A gust of wind shoved at her back, invaded the hall, sprayed his white shirt lightly. "What a night!" She was still shouting; she swallowed to bring on calm, stepped inside.

Carl smiled, thunder pounded, he closed the door. Wind whistled as the door resisted its final inch, then was choked off. "A lot of wind in it," Carl said.

Martha found an umbrella-stand near the door, put her umbrella there. "Gosh, this is certainly nice of you and Nina, Carl."

"You know we're always glad to have you," he said. Nice tight home, but the thunder penetrated it.

"It's so really terrible out." She still felt a little giddy from the run over—foolish, of course, but, then, why not? Her shoes were greasy with mud. "I don't want to track, I—"

"Just toss those things down on the bench there." Carl was a large man, pale, a little soft perhaps.

"When I called Nina, well, I know I'm being just terribly silly, but—"

"Not at all," Carl smiled. "We're only sorry it has taken a storm to get you over."

She tossed her rainhat on the bench, unbuttoned her coat. Fingers still uncertain. Thunder slammed through the dim hall, but at least her fear was ebbing. Carl lifted the coat from her shoulders. She jerked her hands awkwardly from the sleeves, clapped them on her upper arms. "Thanks."

"You must be cold." Carl tossed the coat over the bench.

"Yes, I guess I am a little, but only for a moment, it's warm here." She tried to smile, felt a little embarrassed. Her summer dress was sleeveless, too light really for this time of year, a silly mistake, but she didn't stop to think, the house alone, the storm—the thunder unsettled her. "But please don't go to any—"

"No trouble at all, Martha, no trouble. Now, here, take off those wet shoes and socks." He smiled at her feet. "I'll go get you some of Nina's." He looked down at her, nodded reassuringly, then walked away heavily towards the back of the hall, entering a room to the right where a light was on. The only other light, except for lightning flashes, came from the fire in the living-room fireplace. "Go on in and warm yourself, Martha," Carl called.

She stepped out of her wet brown suede shoes and pulled off her socks, caked with mud above the shoetops. She searched for something to wipe her feet with, but the hall was poorly lit. Finally, after a quick glance towards the back of the hall, she squatted hastily, dabbed the hem of her dress against her feet. She stood, brushed the dress. A loud slam of thunder: she swallowed, caught her breath. She stepped down into the living room, bright with the light of the fire. "It's so good to be here," she said, aloud but to herself. Barefoot, she walked to the fireplace and rubbed her chilled hands in front of the flames, then turned her back to them.

"Here, put these on," said Carl, entering. "I hope they fit. Nina has pretty small—"

Martha sat on a white hassock in front of the fire and pulled on the socks, warm and dry to her feet. Thunder, and again the uneasiness, but she put it down. Carl loosened the laces on the shoes, knelt down to try them on her feet. He grasped the top of her foot and ankle firmly, tried gently to work one of the shoes on. It was a little too small. "They must be fives," Martha said.

"Oh," said Carl, still holding her foot. "Well, look, maybe she has—"

"No, please, don't bother. Really. I'll just—no, these socks are plenty, Carl."

"Well, I was only thinking she might have some slippers or—"

"No, I'm serious, it's really quite okay."

Carl stood, hesitated a moment above her, then sat on a large green couch to the right of her, next to the wall. He sat at the far end, near the fire. "Well, be sure to let me know, Martha. I mean, if that's not enough. I can always—"

Martha made a gesture of protest. She gazed into the bright warm fire. Outside, there was another crack of thunder, but more distant now, and here in the Lunds' living room it was comfortable and quiet. "Nina must have thought I was a silly goose to call her and—"

"Of course not! Don't—"

"No, I mean, well, the storm and all, it's kind of, of, well, childish and silly."

Carl lit a cigarette, tossed the match towards the fireplace. It struck the fireguard, fell in a pale red arc to the marble ledge between the fireplace and the rug. "Oh, I'm sorry. Care for a cigarette?" He leaned towards her with the pack.

"No, thank you." Another rumble outside. It was passing. "It's just that I can't accustom myself to living out here, I guess. Oh, it's all right when Jim's at home, but when he's out of town, well, it's just so—I mean, I feel so . . ."

"Yes, I know."

"In the city, it's not so frightening. There's always someone near, you don't have to, you know, but out here, it's so—so isolated."

"Yes, there are advantages and disadvantages," Carl acknowledged. He took a deep lungful of smoke, exhaled it slowly, thoughtfully, towards the flames. He crossed his left foot over his right knee and leaned back, staring idly at the fire.

"Well, anyway, thank God there's you and Nina," laughed Martha. "I'm so glad we were able to meet each other last week at the club. I've just been so miserable not knowing anyone near, and you were both so kind to suggest, I mean, offering me, well, you just don't know how thankful I am. With that storm and all tonight, and Jim gone, and that big empty house—well, you just can't imagine how happy I was that you were home, when I heard Nina's voice and, well, the thunder and—"

"We are always happy to have you," Carl said.

She had made her own opening, for it had been on her mind. "Speaking of Nina, where is she?"

"Well, I'm afraid you'll just get angry if I tell you," Carl said, smiling ruefully, "but as soon as you called, Nina insisted on going out to get some food and another bottle of brandy, and, well, I think she said that we were out of Aspirin or something, and that maybe you—"

"*Oh, no!* Oh, don't tell me! She shouldn't have!"

"Well," Carl laughed, "you know Nina. I said, Nina, we have plenty of food for a month of storms, and there's always beer, and—well, but once Nina sets her mind to something, and I think she rather likes you."

"I'm terribly embarrassed, if you want to know. That storm and the long drive to town and, really! it wasn't at all—"

"Well, don't be!" Carl laughed lightly, leaned forward. "I assure you, after living with Nina fourteen years, it's the only way she knows how to live, nothing she enjoys more."

"Well, it's just awful." Martha felt upset. Did they take her to be a child? She rubbed her feet.

"Are you sure you wouldn't like a pair of slippers, or—?"

"Carl, if you do one more thing for me, either of you, I'll just, I mean, *really*, I'm quite ashamed! I had no—"

A sudden clap of thunder, unexpected, so loud it seemed to have originated in the hallway. "*Good heavens!*" she cried.

"That last effort, I suppose," said Carl calmly.

"Do you think that's—? Yes, I suppose it *is* just the end of it." She sat back. Still, she felt a little uneasy. Storms unnerved her. Foolish, of course. She stared at the fire, crackling warmly, sought calm in it.

"I hope it didn't hit anything. I think everything is grounded." He spoke precisely. He took a final draw on his cigarette and, exhaling carefully, leaned towards the fireplace and tossed the butt over the guard into the flames. They were both quiet for a few moments. "Jim have to make these trips frequently?"

"Every other month, about a week. Used to be worse, but now it's just a week every second month." But she felt disinclined to talk about it. "Too often, I'm afraid."

"It's too bad. Will he always have to—?"

"Good heavens! I hope not!" she laughed. "Can you imagine? I would have to start paying you rent!"

Carl laughed. "Well, we'd take it out in drinks at the club."

"That's an idea!" cried Martha. "Of course! We'll have to take you to dinner with us one night. That's a wonderful idea! Just as soon as Jim gets back. Now, you see? I don't feel nearly so guilty!"

"Well, I didn't mean to invite myself to a dinner," Carl protested, laughing. "You know you're always welcome. I didn't—"

"No, it's a perfect idea! One night next week, when Jim is here again, you and Nina and Jim and I, we'll go to the club, and we can all laugh at how silly I am!" She sat up gaily on the hassock, smiling broadly. She felt better, much better. Carl returned her smile, though it was partly lost in shadow. He uncrossed his legs, recrossed them, now his right foot over his left knee. There was a pause. The room was still, but for the crackle of the diminishing fire. Evidently, the storm had passed on.

"I hope nothing happens to Nina," said Martha suddenly, looking back at the fire. "Such a bad night. Even a flat tyre would be..." She let her voice trail off. No sense bringing on bad luck.

Although there was no thunder now, the wind could still be heard turning the corners of the house. Little was left of the fire. A log caved in, sparks burst, settled. She rubbed her feet, warm now, though Nina's socks were a little tight. She worked her fingers between the toes. Her feet were warm, yes, but her shoulders or her chest or something still felt slightly chilled. As though... She glanced again at Carl and discovered his gaze was still on her. The left side of his face was consumed by shadow. Yet, she detected a smile, she was sure of it. Behind his back—indistinct bodiless patterns cast by the last of the fire. "I, I think we need a log or something..." Voice sounded so empty. Above the coals the wind whistled over the chimney. Although the room was now quite dark, her eyes were growing used to it. "It's such a terrible night. I hope Nina..."

She looked up again at Carl Lund. No change in his position. She could not be sure now if he were smiling or not. At the far end of the couch, right foot still on the left knee. White shirt glowing dully in the dark room. Outline of the couch blurred into the shadows. Greyish cushion at the near end. Self-consciously, confused, she stared down at her own feet, snug in Nina's white socks. And then she remembered what it was that had seemed odd to her: that the socks had not been rolled together at the tops, had not been soft and flat as after a washing. They had looked moulded, as though—as though they had just come off a pair of feet...

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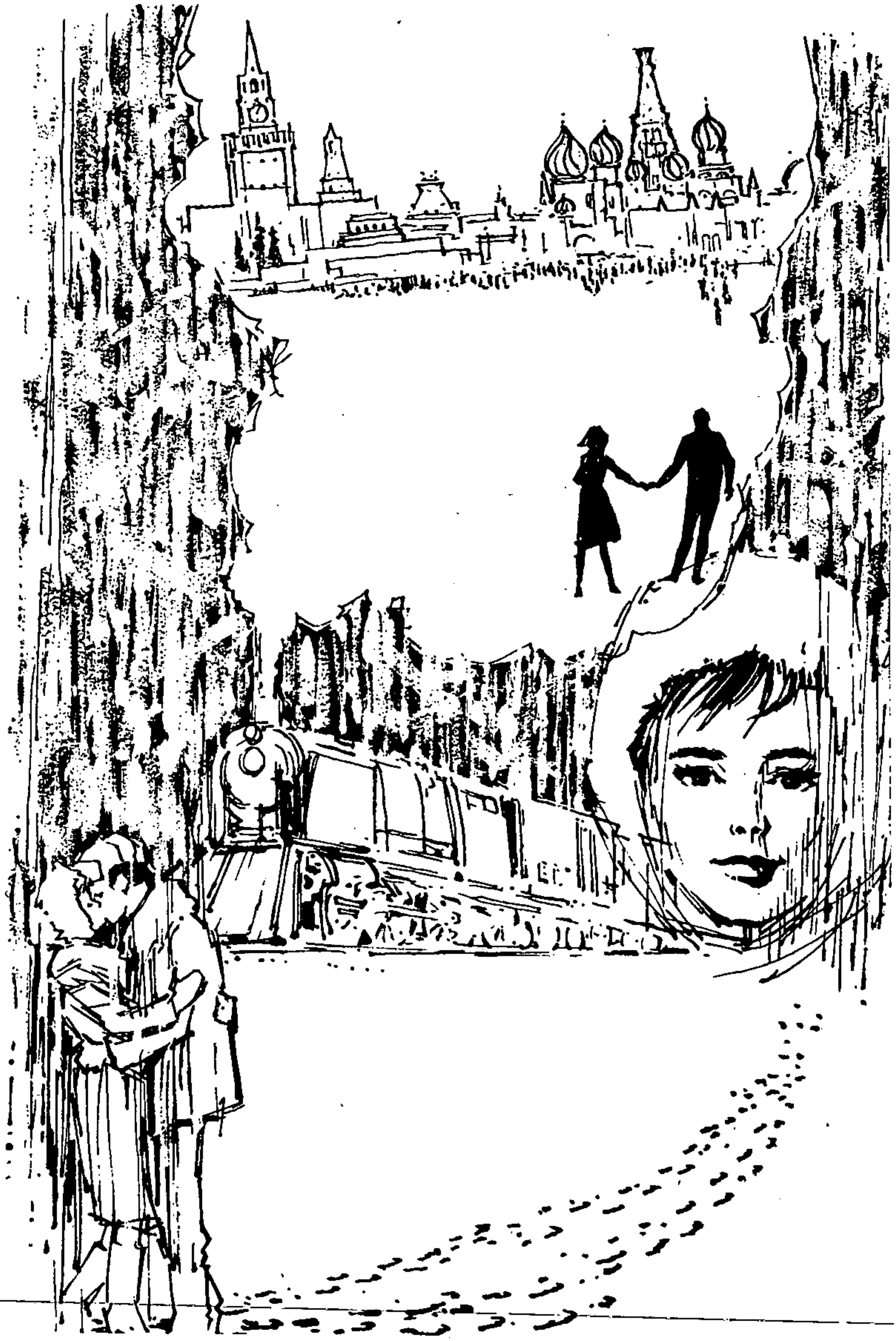

From Russia, a brilliant new writer who tells the story of a first love in present-day Moscow

Light blue and green

BY YURY KAZAKOV

LILYA," she said in a deep husky voice, holding out her hand which was small and warm. I squeezed it cautiously and let it go, muttering my name—or did I only remember to say it later? Her hand was very white in the half-darkness. What a delicate, what an unusual hand! I thought, enraptured.

We were standing in the deep well of the courtyard. It was dark and square—and what a lot of lighted windows looked out on it!—green and pale-blue windows, pink and plain white. Music was coming from a pale-blue window on the first floor. A wireless was playing jazz. I'm very fond of jazz—not to dance to, I don't know how to dance, but I like listening to good jazz music. Many people hate it, but I like it. Perhaps I'm wrong. Anyway, there I stood, listening to the jazz coming from the pale-blue window on the first floor. The reception was excellent.

After she had spoken her name there was a long silence. I knew that something was expected of me. Perhaps she was waiting for me to start a conversation, make a joke, ask a question she could answer. But I was silent, wholly in the power of the rhythm and the silver trumpets of the music. Thank goodness, there was music and I could be silent!

Finally, we made a move. We came out into the lighted street. There were four of us: my friend and his girl, and Lilya and I. We were going to the cinema. It was the first time I was taking a girl to the cinema, the first time I had met Lilya and shaken hands with her and heard her name—her wonderful name, spoken in her husky voice. And now we were walking side by side, strangers and yet somehow acquainted. I no longer had the music to protect me. My

friend and his girl had dropped behind. Terrified, I slowed down, but so did they. I knew he was doing it on purpose. It was very wrong of him. I would never have expected such a piece of treachery from my friend.

What could I say to her? What were her interests, her tastes? I gave her a cautious, sidelong glance: shining eyes reflected the lights; dark, probably coarse, hair; thick eyebrows, almost joined in a single line, gave her a highly determined look, and yet her cheeks were quivering as if she were making an effort not to laugh. What could I say to her?

"Do you like Moscow?" she asked me, with a stern look.

I started at the sound of her deep voice. How could anyone in the world have such a voice?

It took me several moments to get my breath. At last I pulled myself together. Yes, of course, I liked Moscow. I was particularly fond of the streets and the alleyways around Arbat Square. But I liked other streets as well—I dried up.

We turned into Arbat Square. I put my hands in my pockets and hummed a tune. All right, let her think I wasn't particularly interested. After all, I could always go home. I lived quite near, and no-one could force me to go to the cinema and watch her trying not to laugh.

But we were there. There was a quarter of an hour to wait before the start of the programme. We stood in the foyer, listening to a singer but not hearing very well because there were a lot of people round us, all talking in low voices. I had noticed long ago that people waiting in a foyer never really listen to the orchestra. Only those who are in front listen and clap—at the back they eat sweets and icecream, and chatter. Deciding that one either listened to a singer properly or not at all, I examined the pictures on the walls. I had never noticed them before but now they interested me. I thought of the artists who had painted them. It was a good idea to hang them in the foyer. It was very nice to have them there.

Lilya looked at me, her eyes grey and shining. How pretty she was! No, not really pretty at all. It was just that she had shining eyes and her cheeks were smooth and pink. When she smiled she dimpled and her eyebrows parted and looked less severe. She had a high, clear forehead. Occasionally it wrinkled, probably when she was thinking.

I really couldn't go on standing next to her! Why did she keep looking at me like that?

"I'll go and have a cigarette," I grunted, leaving her abruptly and going to the smoking room where I sat down with relief.

But the odd thing is that when a room is full of smoke and the air is dark with it, you don't really feel like smoking.

I looked round: there were a lot of people sitting or standing about. Some were calmly making conversation, others were smoking hurriedly in silence, taking deep pulls and throwing their cigarettes away half smoked and rushing out. Why were they in a hurry? It's an interesting thing that if you smoke too fast, your cigarette gets a sourish, bitter taste. It is better to smoke slowly, quietly.

I looked at my watch: still five minutes to go. But why was I such a fool? Other people make friends, they talk, they are tremendously witty, they can talk football or anything else. They even argue about cybernetics. I would never dream of talking cybernetics to a girl. Lilya must be hard, I thought; she had coarse hair. Mine was soft. Perhaps that was why I was sitting and smoking when I didn't feel like it. Still, I'd stay a moment longer. What should I do in the foyer? Look at the pictures? They were rotten pictures, how had anyone had the idea of hanging them? I had been quite right not to notice them before.

At last the bell went. Very slowly, I came out and found Lilya in the crowd. Not looking at each other we went in and sat down. The lights went out and the film began.

As we were coming out, my friends vanished. The blow was such that I ceased to think about anything. We walked in utter silence. The streets were almost empty of pedestrians. A few cars shot past. Our steps echoed loudly against the walls. We reached her house. Again we stopped in the courtyard. It was late, not all the windows had lights in them, the courtyard was much darker. Most of the white and pink windows had gone out, only the green were shining, and the pale-blue one on the first floor. The music had stopped. We stood for a while.

Lilya was acting strangely: looking up as though counting the windows, then turning away from me and fidgeting with her hair. Finally I said very casually that we ought to meet next day. I was glad it was dark and she couldn't see my ears burning.

Lilya agreed. I could fetch her at home, she had a room facing the street. She was on holiday, her family had gone to the country, she was rather bored. She would love to come out.

I was wondering whether it would be proper to shake hands

again when she offered me her hand: it was pale and narrow in the half-light, and again I felt its confiding warmth.

Next day I came in the afternoon. There were a lot of children in the yard. Two of them had a bicycle and were setting off somewhere—or perhaps had just come back. The rest were standing about. I felt they were watching me and knew exactly why I had come. I couldn't bear to walk through the yard so I went up to her window; it faced the street. I looked in and coughed.

"Lilya, are you there?" I called loudly—very loudly and without a tremor in my voice. It was absolutely wonderful.

Yes, she was there. She had a friend with her. They were having such an interesting argument, I must come in and arbitrate.

"Hurry up and come in," called Lilya.

But I still couldn't bear to walk through the yard.

"I'll come through the window," I said resolutely and sprang lightly and gracefully on to the windowsill. It was only when I had swung one leg across that I saw the startled amusement on the face of Lilya's friend and her own embarrassment. Feeling instantly that I had done the wrong thing, I froze, astride the sill, staring at Lilya.

"Well, get in," she said impatiently, her eyebrows drawn together and her cheeks getting pinker and pinker.

"I hate sitting in a stuffy room in summer," I muttered, putting on a haughty expression. "I'll wait for you outside."

I strolled towards the gate. How they must be laughing at me! I knew that girls are cruel and never understand us. Why had I come? Why be a laughing stock? The best thing was to go. If I started running at once, I would be round the corner before she came out. I took an instant to reflect on whether this would be appropriate or not; then, turning, I saw her coming out of the gate with her friend. Her eyes were still laughing and her cheeks dimpling.

I didn't look at the friend. Why was she coming with us? What would I do with the two of them? I said nothing and Lilya started a conversation with her friend. They talked; I listened. We passed some posters and I read them attentively. If you read posters backwards they make funny guttural words. When we reached the corner, Lilya's friend said goodbye. I looked at her gratefully. She was very pretty and seemed intelligent.

She left and we went to Tverskoy Boulevard. What a lot of young people in love stroll in Tverskoy Boulevard. True, we

were not yet in love. Or perhaps we were; I wasn't sure. We walked about a yard apart. The lime blossom was over, but there were a lot of flowers in the beds. They had no smell and I didn't know what they were called; perhaps no-one did.

We talked and talked. There was no sequence in our conversation or our thoughts. We talked about ourselves and our friends, jumping from subject to subject, forgetting what we had been talking about the moment before. This didn't worry us, we had plenty of time—a long, long evening before us—so we could go back to what we had forgotten to say. And after that, the night in which to remember everything we had said.

Suddenly I noticed that her dress was undone. She had a curious dress on, I had never seen one like it on anyone else. It had press-studs in front, all the way down to her waist. Several of them had come undone and she hadn't noticed. I couldn't let her walk about the street with her dress unfastened. But how could I tell her? Perhaps I could stop and do them up for her? Make a joke of it and do them up, as if there were nothing unusual about it? It would be nice if I could. But it was impossible. Turning away, I waited for a pause and told her to do herself up. She fell silent at once. I read a big advertisement at the top of a house. It said that everyone could win a hundred thousand roubles. Nice if we could win it!

I lit a cigarette. I took a long time about it. The best thing you can do in an awkward pause is to light a cigarette. It always helps. After that I took a cautious glance at her. Her dress was fastened, her cheeks crimson, her eyebrows dark and stern. She looked at me as if I had changed greatly or had learned something important about her. We walked a little closer together.

Hour after hour went by, we were still walking—walking and talking. In Moscow you can walk for ever. We passed Pushkin Square, then Trubnoy Square, and walked along the Neglinka to the Bolshoi and on to the Stone Bridge. I was willing never to stop. I only worried in case she was tired. No, she said, she wasn't, it was great fun. The street lights went out. The sky, now that the streets were dark, hung lower, and there were many more stars. Later on there was a quiet dawn. Lovers were sitting on the benches along the boulevards, a couple to every bench. I looked at them with envy.

There was no-one on the streets except policemen. They all

looked at us and some coughed as we went by, looking as if they wanted to say something but not saying it. Lilya dropped her head and hurried but I found them comic for some reason. Now we were walking close enough together for her hand occasionally to brush against mine. It was the lightest possible touch but I was intensely conscious of it.

We said goodbye at last, in her quiet, echoing yard. Everyone was asleep; there was not a single light. We spoke softly, almost in a whisper, but even this was too loud and I felt as if someone were listening.

I got home at three and only then felt how numb my feet were. How much more tired Lilya must be! I turned on the desk lamp and read *Hatter's Castle* which Lilya had lent me. It was a remarkable book and, as I read it, I kept seeing Lilya's face. Sometimes I closed my eyes and could hear her soft husky voice. Turning a page I came across a long dark hair, it must have been one of hers—she too had read *Hatter's Castle*. Why had I ever thought that her hair was coarse? The hair was as fine and soft as silk. I rolled it up carefully and for the time being put it inside a volume of my encyclopædia; later on, I would find a better hiding place.

It was daylight, I was too tired to read any more. I lay down and looked at the window. We lived high up, on the sixth floor. At nights, looking across the roofs into the distance where the sun came up in summer, I could see the star on the Kremlin tower. I could see the star but not the tower itself. I liked looking at it and listening to the Kremlin chimes at night. Sounds are very clear at night. I lay, looking at the star and thinking of Lilya.

A week later I left with my mother for the North. I had been looking forward to it for a long time, ever since the spring. But that summer the country assumed a new meaning for me.

For the first time in my life I saw forests; real, savage forests and I was filled with the joy of discovery. I went shooting. I had been given a gun when I passed out of the ninth form.

I wandered about by myself, and I was never bored though sometimes I got tired. Then I sat and looked at the wide river and the low autumn sky. It was August. In the North the weather is often rough in August. But rain or sun I got up early and went to the forest. I shot game or picked mushrooms or just walked from clearing to clearing and looked at

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the daisies—the clearings were full of them. There was always plenty to do in the woods. I could sit motionless on the shore of a lake. Ducks came flying in and alighted, hissing, on the water beside me. At first they sat with their necks stretched out, then they began to dive and splash and swim together or alone. I followed them with my eyes, without turning my head.

The sun would come out of the clouds, break through the branches overhead and thrust its quivering golden fingers deep into the water. The long rusty stems of the water lilies became visible and, near them, large fish, frozen in the shaft of sunlight, not a fin moving, as if they were warming themselves or asleep. I felt very strange watching them, as if I too was unable to move, seeing everything as in a dream.

There was any amount to do in the forest. I could lie and listen to the wind in the pine trees and think about Lilya. I could even talk to her. I told her about shooting, and about the lakes and woods and about the marvellous smell of gunpowder, and she understood me, although women as a rule are neither fond of shooting nor see the point of it.

Sometimes I stayed out until late at night. It was a bit frightening, going home across the fields. Even though I had a loaded gun with me, I kept looking over my shoulder. It was very dark. The only semblance of light was in the sky and even there you had to look for it. The earth was pitch-dark. Owls circled overhead without making a sound. I could see them but never, however hard I tried, could I hear their wings. I once shot one. It thudded into the verge of the road and for a long time its beak clattered in the dark.

I stayed away a month. Back in Moscow, I went straight from the station to see Lilya, only dropping my luggage at home on the way. It was evening; there was a light in her window, so I knew she was at home. I went up to the house, making my way through struts and ladders—the house was being repaired; I looked between the curtains.

She was alone, sitting by her desk, reading by the light of a table lamp. Her face was thoughtful. She turned a page and looked up at the lamp, winding a strand of hair round her finger. How dark her eyes were! Why had I imagined them grey? They were almost black. I stood under the scaffolding; there was a smell of pine and plaster. The smell of pinewood came to me as a distant reminder of everything I had left in the North. I could hear footsteps behind me. People were walking past, were going somewhere, hurrying,

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tramping on the asphalt, each with his own thoughts and his own loves and living his own life. I was deafened by the sounds and lights and smells and crowds of Moscow—I had got unused to them during my month away. I thought with timid joy of how good it was that in this huge city I, too, had my beloved.

"Lilya!" I called softly.

She started; her eyebrows quivered. Getting up, she came to the window, drew the curtain and leaned out; I could see her eyes, dark and happy.

"Alyosha!" she cried softly, her cheeks dimpling. "Alyosha! You? Is it really you? I'll come out. Shall we go for a walk? Do let's go for a walk. I'll come out at once."

I picked my way out of the scaffolding, crossed the road and stood watching her window. The light went out and a moment later Lilya appeared in the dark shadow of the open gate. She saw me at once and ran across the street. She seized my hands and held them. I thought she was browner and thinner. Certainly her eyes were larger. I could hear her breath coming in short gasps.

"Let's go," she said at last. It was only now I realised that she had been saying "thou" to me. I terribly wanted to sit down or lean against something. My legs were shaking more than they had after my longest day in the woods.

But I felt uncomfortable about going for a walk with her. I had only meant to drop in for a moment. I was so badly dressed. I had come straight from the station in my skiing kit and trodden-down boots. My suit had several holes burnt in it. I had slept in it when I was out shooting. If you sleep beside a camp fire you very often burn holes in your jacket and trousers. No, I couldn't possibly go with her.

"What rubbish!" she said, pulling me by the hand. She had to talk to me. She was alone, her school friends were all away, her parents still in the country, she had no-one to talk to, she had been waiting and waiting for me to come back. Who cared about my suit? And why hadn't I written to her? Did I like making people miserable?

Once again, we were walking in the Moscow streets. It was a strange, mad evening. The rain came down and we hid in an echoing gateway, panting because we had run so fast, and watched the street. Water gurgled in the drain pipe, the pavement glittered, wet cars passed and the red and white reflections of their lights snaked towards us across the wet asphalt. The rain stopped and we came out, laughing, jumping over the

puddles. Then it started again as hard as ever and again we took shelter. Drops of rain sparkled in her hair. But when she looked at me her eyes shone even brighter than the drops of rain.

"Did you think of me?" she asked. "I was thinking of you nearly all the time, though I didn't want to. I don't know why it was. After all, we hardly know each other, do we? Did your ears burn? They say that when someone thinks about you a lot, your ears burn. I didn't even go to the Bolshoi. Mama gave me a ticket, but I didn't go. Are you fond of the opera?"

"Very. I might become a singer. I've been told I've got a good bass voice."

"Alyosha! Really? Do sing something. Please. Sing very softly so that only I can hear you."

I refused. Then I gave in. I sang romances and arias, and never noticed that the rain had stopped and there were people walking past and looking at us. Lilya didn't notice either. She was looking at me, her eyes shining.

It's terrible to be young. The years go so fast, before you know where you are you are seventeen, eighteen, and you haven't yet done anything. You don't even know if you have any gifts or not. And you want such tremendous things out of life! You want to write poetry, and that the whole country should learn it by heart. Or compose a heroic symphony, and afterwards appear in the orchestra—white, in tails, your hair falling over your forehead... And Lilya looking at you from a box!

What, what was I to do, so that my life should not be wasted, so that every day should be a day of struggle and of triumph? I lived in misery, tormented by the thought that I might not be an explorer, a discoverer, a hero. Was I capable of heroism? I didn't know. Was I capable of hard work? Did I have the strength to achieve great things? The worst of it was that no-one understood. Everyone treated me like a boy, sometimes they even ruffled my hair, as though I were ten! Only Lilya, only she could understand, only to her could I open my heart and my mind.

We had spent a great many years at school; she was in the ninth form, I in the tenth. I had decided to take up swimming and become the champion of the USSR and later of the world. I had been going regularly to the pool for the past three months. I regarded the crawl as the best style—the

swiftest and the most dashing. I enjoyed it. But in the evenings I liked to think and dream.

There is a brief moment on winter evenings when the sky and the snow on the roofs are blue in the twilight, sometimes even purple. As I stood by the open window, looking at the purple snow and breathing the light frosty air, I dreamed of distant journeys, unknown countries, mountains... I starved, I grew a red beard, I was baked by the sun or frozen to the marrow, I even died, but I discovered another of Nature's secrets. That was life! If only I could join an expedition!

I did the rounds of the appropriate firms and ministries. There are a lot of them in Moscow and they all have glamorous, enigmatic names. Yes, there was an expedition setting off —to Central Asia, to the Urals, to the North. Yes, they needed men. What was my special field? I had none? They were very sorry but they couldn't help me. It was essential to have training. Go as a labourer? They hired them locally. Good luck!

And so again I was at school, I was doing homework. There was nothing for it. I would do my tenth year at school, I would even go on to college. I didn't care. I would go to college and become an engineer or a schoolteacher. But the world would have lost a great explorer.

December came. I spent all my free time with Lilya. I loved her more and more. I had never known that love could be infinite. Now I knew. With every month Lilya was becoming dearer to me, and there was no sacrifice I would not have made for her.

She often rang me up. We had long conversations over the telephone, after which I found it impossible to go back to my books. The real winter came with hard frosts and heavy snowstorms. My mother wanted to go to the country but she had no warm winter shawl. My aunt who lived in the country had one. My mother asked me to go and fetch it.

I set out on a Sunday morning. But instead of going straight to the station I stopped to see Lilya. We went to the skating rink, then to the Tretyakovsky Gallery to get warm after skating. The gallery is very warm in winter, and there are chairs where you can sit and talk softly. We wandered through the halls, looking at the pictures. I am very fond of Serov's *Girl with Apples*. Lilya blushed and laughed when I told her that the girl was like her. From time to time we forgot the pictures and sat and looked into each other's eyes and whispered. Meanwhile it was getting dark. The gallery

was about to close. We went out into the frost and I remembered with a start that I was meant to be fetching the shawl. I told Lilya. Well, what did it matter, we decided, we'd go now, it would be fun.

So we went, happy not to have to separate. We took the suburban train and got out on a platform heaped with snow and walked along a country road across the fields. Ahead and behind us were the dark figures of people who, like us, had got off the train. We could hear them talking and laughing, and see the glow of their cigarettes. One of them threw away a butt. It was still glowing when we came up to it; round it was a tiny pink circle of light on the snow. We were careful not to step on it.

We crossed a creaking bridge across a frozen river. It was freezing hard. We turned into a cutting through the woods and it grew much darker. The firs and the pines were solid black. Only the windows of some of the houses in the woods threw streaks of yellow light on the snow. Many houses were dark and silent, shut up for the winter. There was a strong smell of birch and fresh snow, which you never get in Moscow.

At last we reached my aunt's house. For some reason it seemed impossible to go in with Lilya.

"Will you wait for me?" I asked hesitantly. "I'll be very quick."

"All right. Only really, don't be long. I'm frozen. My feet are frozen. And my face. No, don't think I'm sorry I came. Only don't be long. All right?"

I left her standing all alone on the dark road, and it gave me a very nasty feeling indeed.

My aunt and my cousin were surprised and delighted to see me. Why so late? How I had grown! Would I stay the night?

"How is your mother?"

"Very well, thank you."

"And your father is working?"

"Yes."

"Still at the same job? How is his health?"

Thousands of questions! My cousin looked up the trains. The next one back wasn't till eleven. I must take off my coat and have some tea. They must have a good look at me and hear all the news. After all, I hadn't been to them for a year —that was a long time.

They took off my coat by brute force. The stove was going, the lamp burning brightly in its pink shade, the grandfather

clock ticking. It was warm and I longed for tea. But Lilya was waiting in the dark clearing.

At last I managed to say, "Forgive me, but I have to hurry. The point is, I'm not alone. I've got a friend waiting outside."

How they scolded me! How could I be so rude? How could I keep a boy waiting outside in this cold? My cousin rushed out, I could hear her footsteps crunching on the snow in the garden; then a silence, then more crunching, as she came back with Lilya. She was frozen white. They took off her outdoor things, made her sit by the stove and put warm felt slippers on her feet.

Little by little we thawed out. Then we moved to the table and had tea. Lilya was crimson with heat and embarrassment. She scarcely raised her face from her cup, except to give me a terribly grave look. But her cheeks were quivering and dimpling. By now I knew what this meant and I felt happy. I had five glasses of tea.

We got up. It was time to go. We put our coats on and I was given the shawl. Suddenly they changed their minds and after making Lilya get out of her coat, wrapped her in the shawl and made her put the coat on over it. She now looked very fat and the shawl covered her face except for her eyes.

We went out and could at first see nothing. Lilya clung to my arm. As we got away from the house we began to make out the path. Lilya burst out laughing. She even fell down twice and I had to pick her up and shake the snow out of her sleeves.

"Your face when I came in!" she gasped. "Petrified! Like an ostrich!"

I too, roared with laughter.

"Alyosha!" she gasped with fright and excitement. "Suppose they hold us up?"

"Who?"

"How do I know? Bandits. We might be murdered."

"Rubbish!" I said loudly—a little too loudly. Suddenly I realised that there were several degrees of frost. It must have got colder while we were having tea.

"Rubbish!" I said again. "There's not a soul about."

"But suppose there is?" She looked over her shoulder. So did I.

"Are you scared?" she asked in a ringing voice.

"No! But... Are you?"

"Terrified. I'm sure they'll take our clothes off. I have a presentiment."

"Do you believe in them?"

"Yes. Why did I come? All the same I'm glad I did."

"Are you?"

"Yes. Even if they rob and kill us, I won't be sorry. What about you? Would you be willing to die for me?"

I only squeezed her hand. If only I could prove my love!

"Alyosha."

"Yes?"

"I want to ask you something. Only don't look at me. Don't dare to look at my face. Now, what was I saying? No, turn away."

"All right, I have. But you'll have to watch where we're going or we'll fall over something."

"I don't care. I've got the shawl on. I won't hurt myself."

"Well?"

"Alyosha, have you ever kissed anyone?"

"Once. In my first form at school. I kissed a little girl. I don't even remember her name."

"Don't you really? Is that true?"

"Yes."

"Then it doesn't count. You were just a child."

"Yes."

"Alyosha . . . Do you want to kiss me?"

"When? Now?" I stumbled and began to again watch where I was going.

"No, no. But if we get to the station without being murdered, I'll kiss you at the station."

I said nothing. I no longer felt the frost. My cheeks were burning and I felt hot. It must have got warmer, or perhaps we were walking very fast.

"Alyosha."

"Yes?"

"I've never kissed anyone. Never at all."

I looked up at the stars. Then I looked ahead at the yellowish night glow over Moscow. Moscow was twenty miles away, yet you could see the glow. How wonderful everything was!

"Does it make one feel ashamed—to kiss, I mean—were you ashamed?"

"I don't remember, it's so long ago. I don't think I was, particularly."

"Yes, but that was long ago. I expect it does."

By now we were crossing the field. This time it was empty —we were all alone. Not a soul ahead or behind us; no-one

throwing burning cigarette butts on the road. Only our feet crunching into the snow. Suddenly there was a pale flicker ahead, like a candle seen at a distance. It shone, it swung to and fro and went out; then it shone again, closer. At last we guessed: an electric torch. Then we made out several small black shapes. People were coming towards us from the station. Had they come off the train? No, there hadn't been a train, we would have heard it.

"There you are." Lilya clutched my arm. "I knew it. Now we'll get murdered. They're bandits."

What could I say to her? I said nothing. We walked on very slowly. Looking hard, I could now make out six figures. I felt in my pocket for my house key, and suddenly felt a hot wave of joy and courage. How I would fight, I thought, choking with excitement and my heart thumping. They were talking loudly but within twenty feet of us they fell silent.

"I wish I'd kissed you," Lilya said sadly. "I'm sorry."

We met in the middle of the field. All six stopped and lit their torches; the weak reddish beams flickered over the snow and converged on our faces. We blinked. They inspected us in silence. Two had their coats unfastened. One hastily finished his cigarette and spat out the butt. I was waiting for a shout or a blow. But there was nothing. We walked on.

"Kid wasn't bad," one of the men said regretfully, after we passed them. "Better hang on to her, fellow, or we might take her off you!"

"Were you scared?" Lilya asked a little later.

"No. I was only worried about you."

"Me?" She gave me an odd, sidelong look and slowed down. "I wasn't a bit frightened. I was only sorry about the shawl."

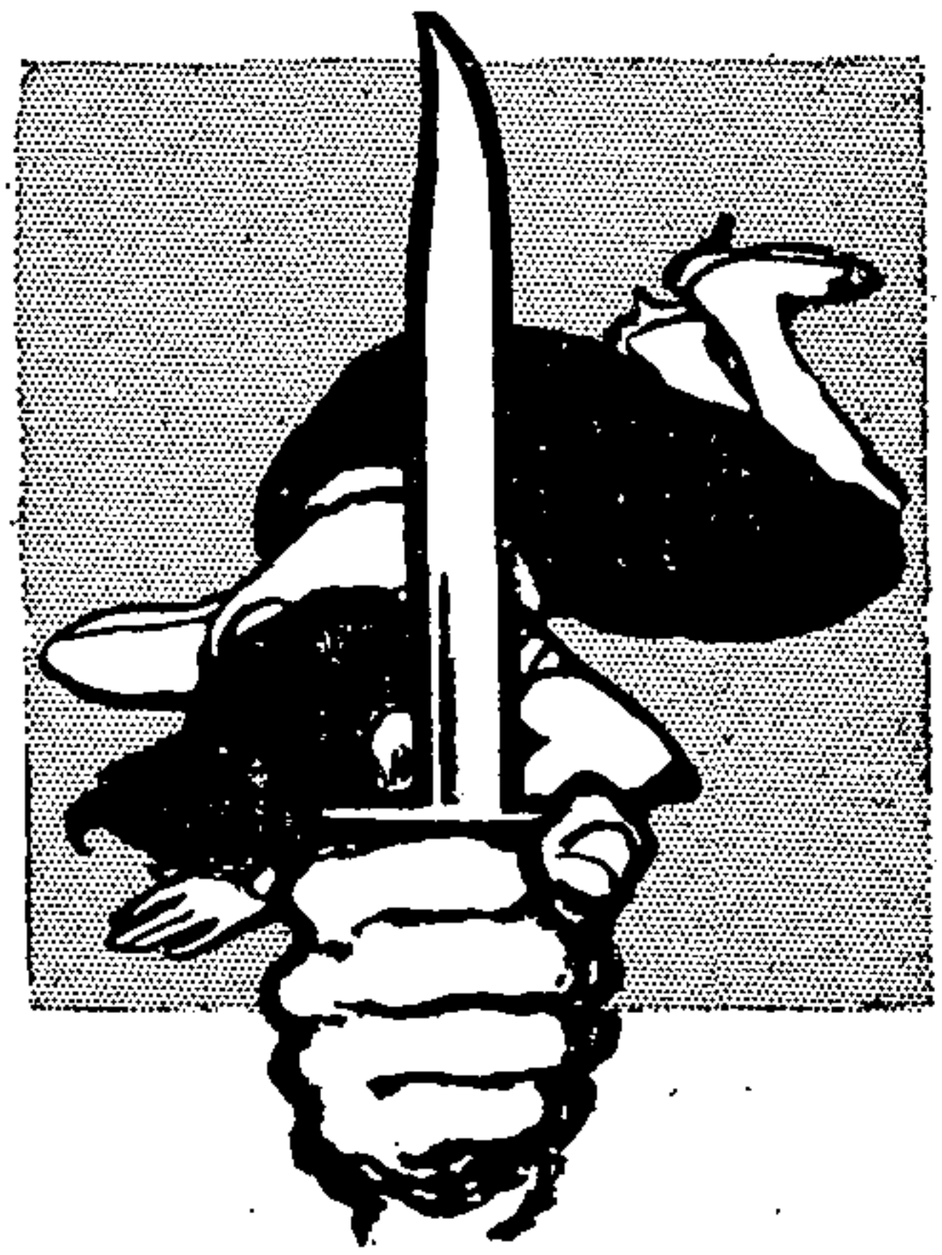
We said nothing more until we came to the station. Reaching up and scattering a flurry of snow, Lilya broke off a pine twig and put it in her pocket. We climbed the steps to the platform. There was not a soul. A single dim bulb outside the ticket office made the snow glitter like salt. We stamped our boots; it was very cold. Suddenly Lilya left me and went to stand against the railing. I stood on the very edge of the platform, craning my neck to watch for the train.

"Alyosha!" Her voice sounded odd.

I went up to her, my knees shaking.

"Hold me, Alyosha. I'm frozen."

I held her close, my face almost touching hers. I could see her eyes. I had never seen them from so near before. Her



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eyelashes were thick with frost and so was her hair where it showed under her shawl. How large her eyes were, and what a frightened look they had! We stood quite still, yet the snow was creaking under our boots. Suddenly there was a sharp crack in the frozen trees behind us. The dry echo rolled over the planks as on the ice of a river and died away at the end of the platform. Why were we saying nothing? But what need was there to speak?

Lilya moved her lips without a sound, her eyes as black as night.

"Well, why don't you kiss me?" she whispered faintly. Our breath mingled, making a single cloud on the frosty air. I looked at her lips. They parted very slightly. I gave them a long kiss, while the world silently reeled. Her lips were warm and her eyes half open. She was kissing and looking at me and I knew how much she loved me.

Now we had kissed for the first time. She pressed her cold cheek against mine and we stood still. I was looking over her shoulder into the dark winter woods on the other side of the track. I could feel her warm breath and the quick beat of her heart, as she could probably feel mine. She stirred and I kissed her again. This time she closed her eyes.

A low whistle came from the distance, and a small, dazzling light flashed. The train arrived.

A moment later we were getting into the warm, brightly lit carriage. The train was half empty. Of the few passengers, some were reading, rustling their newspapers, others dozing, swaying to and fro with the carriage. Lilya sat without a word all the way to Moscow, looking through the window although it was frosted over and there was positively nothing to be seen in the darkness outside.

At what precise moment had I fallen in love with Lilya? Was it while I was wandering about alone in the forest in the North? Or when we kissed at the station? Or when she first gave me her hand and told me her name? All I knew now was that I couldn't live without her—it would be utterly pointless and I could no more bear to think of it than of the possible death of my near ones.

The winter was wonderful. The whole world was ours and we held everything in common—our past, our future, our happiness and our whole life to its dying breath.

But, by the spring, I began to notice a change. It was nothing definite but I felt with pain that something new was

beginning. I don't think I could have put it into words. Simply, we became aware of the difference between our characters. She disliked my opinions, she laughed at my ambitions—she laughed cruelly and we had several rows. And after that . . . After that everything began to go downhill, faster and faster, more and more horribly. More and more often she was out when I called; more and more, our conversations were unnaturally bright and empty. With every time, I felt that she was going farther and farther away from me . . .

How many girls of seventeen are there in the world? But there is only one into whose eyes you look and see their light, their depth, only one whose voice moves you almost to tears, and even whose hands you are afraid to kiss. She speaks to you or she listens, she laughs or is silent, and all the time you know that it is you alone she needs, you alone she lives for and loves, just as you love her.

And then one day you realise with terror that the eyes which until now had given you their warmth, their light, their love, have become indifferent and withdrawn, and that she herself has moved away from you to an irrevocable distance where you will never find her. Your holiest aspirations, your proudest and most secret dreams are no longer for her, she has rejected them, as she has rejected the whole of you with all the beauty and complexity of your soul.

However hard you pursue her, whatever efforts you make, she eludes you and you miss her again and again and everything you do is always wrong. She has slipped away, she has vanished into her own wonderful, unique world, a paradise which is not for sinners like you. How immense is your despair and rage, how infinite the regret and sorrow which overwhelm you! You are crushed, betrayed, annihilated.

You have nothing left and all you can do is throw yourself on the ground and howl your pain and your helplessness to the unknown God. But if you do this, she will give you a look of fear or astonishment or pity—anything except what you need: the knowledge that she loves you and lives for you. Even if you were a hero or a genius and the whole country were proud of you, you would still not get from her this one look you need.

How hard, how painful it is to live!

So now it was spring. A lot of sun and light, the sky blue and the lime trees along the avenues just beginning to be scented. Everyone was cheerfully making plans for May Day.

So was I. I had been given a hundred roubles, I was the richest man in the world! And I had three whole days in front of me, three whole days to spend with Lilya—she couldn't possibly be working for her exam during those three days. I was going nowhere, seeing no-one else. I would be with Lilya, we would be together all those days. It was a long time since we had been together.

But she could not be with me. She had to go to the country to see her uncle who was ill. Her uncle was old and ill and lonely; he wanted to have his family round him on May Day, so she and her parents were going. Excellent! Splendid to go to the country for May Day. But I would so like to see her. What about the 2nd.

The 2nd? She wrinkled her forehead and blushed. Well, perhaps she could manage to get away. Of course, she'd love to, it was ages... All right, then, the evening of the second, outside the Telegraph Office in Gorky Street.

I waited outside the Telegraph Office. What crowds in the street! There was a globe, above my head, lit up although it was still twilight—blue, with yellow continents, and quietly revolving. The street blazed with the golden sheaves and green and pale-blue flashes of the illuminations. They made all the faces beautiful. My hundred roubles were in my pocket. I hadn't spent them the day before. We could go anywhere—to the park perhaps, or the cinema. Everyone around me looked impatient, I alone was astonishingly calm.

Crowds were moving down the middle of the street. So many girls and boys—all singing, shouting, playing the accordion. All the houses were beflagged, covered with slogans, blazing with lights. People were singing and I felt like joining in; after all I had a good voice. I had a good bass. I had meant to be a singer. I had meant to be and do so many things.

Suddenly I saw her. She was making her way through the crowd, climbing the steps, so beautiful that everyone turned to look. Never yet had she been so beautiful. My heart raced. She glanced at the faces around her, looking for someone. She was looking for me. I took one step, only one, before a sharp pain hit me in the heart. She was not alone! Standing beside her and looking at me was a young man in a hat. He was a goodlooking young man and he was holding her by the arm. I had known her for a month and a half before I dared to take her by the arm.

"Hello, Alyosha!" Her voice was a little unsteady and she

looked a little embarrassed—not much. "Have you been waiting long? I think we're a bit late."

She glanced up at the clock under the globe and frowned. Then she turned and looked at the young man. Her neck had a very tender curve when she was looking at him. Had she ever looked at me like that?

She introduced us and we shook hands. His grip was full of confidence.

"You know, Alyosha, I'm awfully sorry, I can't make it tonight. We're on our way to the Bolshoi. You're not offended?"

"No. I'm not offended."

"Will you walk with us a little way? As you're not busy . . ."

"No, I'm not busy. All right."

We moved with the crowd towards Okhotny Road. Why did I go? What had come over me? There was a lot of noise —people singing all around us, accordions playing, loud-speakers thundering from the rooftops. I had a hundred roubles in my pocket. A brand-new, crackling hundred-rouble note.

But why and where was I going?

"How is your uncle?"

"My uncle? What uncle? Oh, you mean about yesterday." She bit her lip and glanced at the boy. "Better. We had a lovely time. We danced. And you, did you have a nice day?"

"Very nice."

"Good. I'm glad."

We turned the corner to the Bolshoi; we were walking three abreast. It was the goodlooking young man who had her on his arm. She was not with me, she was with him. She was a thousand miles away from me. I had a tickle in my throat and my eyes were smarting. Perhaps I was going down with flu. We stopped in front of the Bolshoi. There was absolutely nothing to say. The young man pressed her elbow.

"Well, we'll go in. Goodbye," said Lilya. How guilty, and yet how distant was her smile!

We shook hands. It was still a nice hand. They turned and walked slowly up the steps and between the pillars. She had grown a lot in the past year. She was seventeen. She had a graceful figure. When did I first notice her figure? Oh yes, in the patch of darkness of the open gate, when I came back from the North. That was when it struck me.

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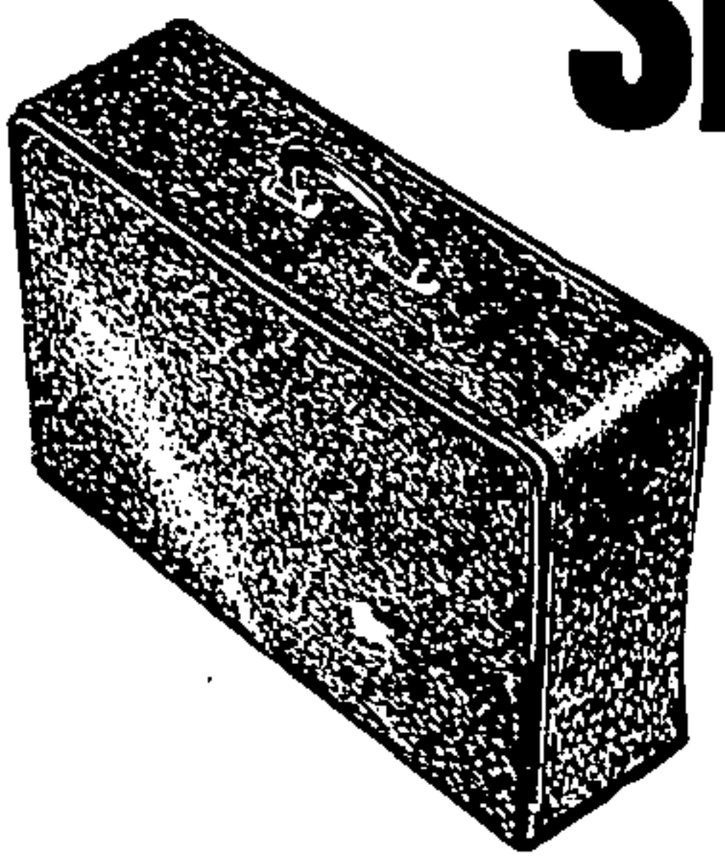

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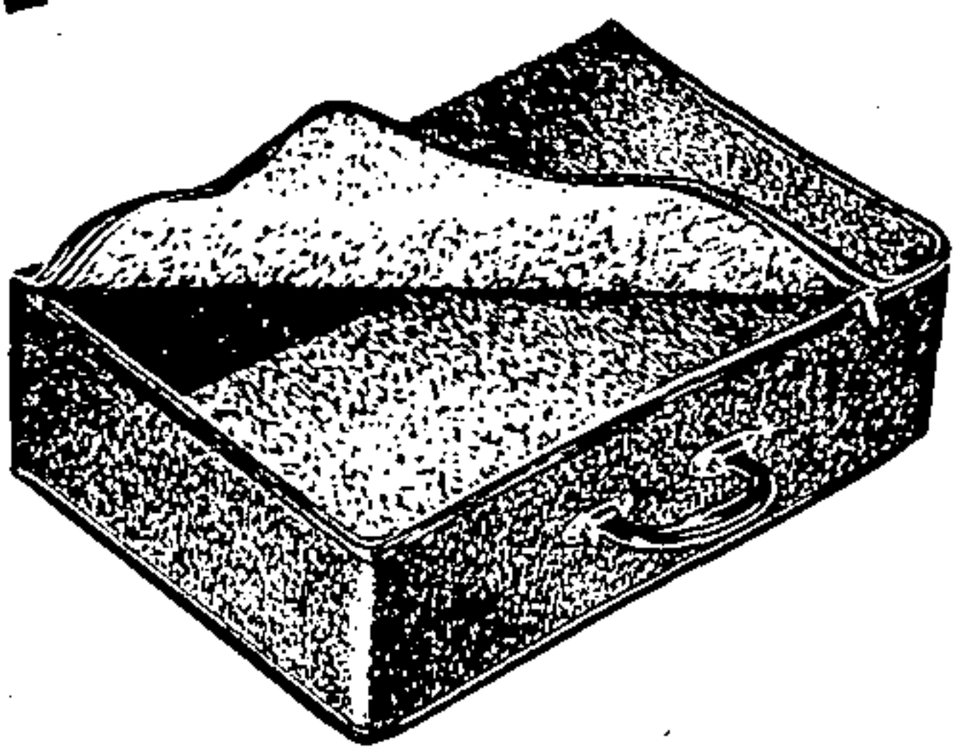

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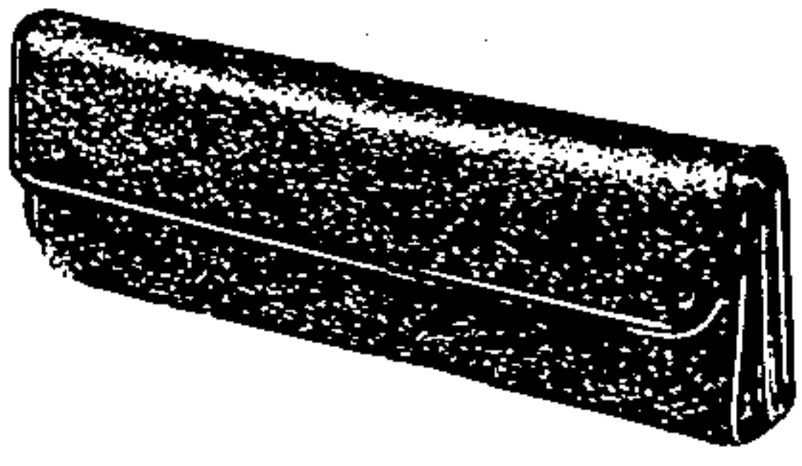

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And again in the Hall of Columns. And at the Conservatoire. And later at the winter ball at school. A wonderful winter ball! But now she was going away and not looking back. She used always to look back. Sometimes she even came back and looked into my face and asked: "Was there something you wanted to say to me?"

"No, nothing," I replied, laughing, happy that she had come back.

She would glance quickly round and say, "Kiss me."

And I kissed her—she smelled of the cold—standing in a square or at a corner of a street. She loved these kisses snatched in the street.

"What do they know?" she said about the passers-by. "We might be brother and sister. How can they tell?"

Now I stood in the street and people were passing me, going round me, as if I were a post, a thing. I could hear them laughing. They went in twos, in threes, in groups—no-one was alone. One should never be alone in a holiday crowd. Those who had no-one to go out with had stayed at home. I stood and watched...They vanished through the lighted doorway. All evening they would listen to the music and be together. The four winged bronze horses on the roof of the Bolshoi above my head were trying to take off into the violet sky but never making it. And I had a hundred roubles in my pocket—a brand new note which I hadn't spent the day before.

A year went by. The world hadn't ended, and life hadn't stopped. I almost forgot Lilya. I did forget her. At any rate I tried not to think about her. What was the point? Once I ran across her in the street. My knees felt weak but I behaved with equanimity. I had lost all interest in what was happening to her. I didn't ask her; nor did she ask me. And yet a lot had happened to me. A year is a long time.

Now I was at college. I worked hard, with no-one to distract me. I was also doing a lot of social work. And going in for swimming—I had at last mastered the crawl. It was the swiftest, the most dashing style. Not that it mattered.

Then one day I got a letter from her. It was again spring, again the month of May, the month of lightness, and I was feeling very light at heart. I love the spring. I had passed my end-of-year exams. I was a second-year student now. And then there came this letter from her. She wrote that she was married. And that she was leaving with her husband for the

North, and that she would like me to come and see her off. She called me "darling," and signed herself: "Your very old friend."

I sat and stared at the wallpaper. It was a pretty wallpaper with a complicated pattern. I liked looking at it. Naturally, I would see her off if she wanted me to. Why not? She wasn't my enemy, she had never wronged me. Certainly I would see her off—especially as I had long since forgotten. Such a lot of things happen to one in a year. One can't remember everything.

So I went to the station on the day and at the time she said. I was a long while searching for her on the crowded platform. Finally I saw her, so suddenly that it gave me a shock. She had on a light sleeveless dress and her face and arms were already touched with sunburn. Her hands looked as gentle as ever, but her face had changed. It was the face of a woman. Yes, she had grown up. There were people round her—her family, her husband. It was the same goodlooking young man. They were talking and laughing, but I noticed that she was looking round for someone.

She was waiting for me. I went up to her and she at once took me by the arm.

"I won't be a moment—" she smiled tenderly at her husband.

He gave me a friendly nod. Yes, of course he remembered me. We shook hands; his grip was magnanimous.

"Well, there it is. I'm grown up and married and going away, and it's goodbye to Moscow." She looked sadly at the station tower. "I'm glad you came. Everything is so strange. You've grown a lot. How are you?"

"Fine." I tried to smile but my face had turned to wood. She looked at me and wrinkled her forehead, as she always did when she was thinking.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing. I'm very happy for you. Have you been married long?"

"Only a week. It's wonderful, being married."

"Yes, it's wonderful."

She laughed. "How do you know? But you're not looking well. Are you all right?"

"It's the sun. And I'm a bit tired. It's the exams. German—you know what it's like."

"Awful!" she laughed. "Do you remember how I used to help you?"

"Yes, I remember." I stretched my lips and smiled.

"Alyosha, what's wrong? Do tell me."

So once again her lovely face was close to mine, but something had gone from it. It had changed, it was almost the face of a stranger. I could not decide if the change was for the better.

"You're hiding something," she said reproachfully. "You used not to be like that."

"I'm not," I said convincingly. "It's just that I didn't get much sleep last night."

She glanced at the clock, then she turned to look at her husband. He nodded to her.

"I'm coming," she called, taking my arm again. "You know, I'm so happy. Do be happy for me. We're going North, to a job. Do you remember how you used to tell me about it? Well, now I'm going . . . Are you happy for me?"

Why, why did she have to ask me? Suddenly she laughed.

"Do you know what I've just remembered? That winter we went to see your aunt and kissed at the station. I kissed you and you were shaking so much that you made the platform creak! You did look silly!"

She was laughing. Then she looked at me, her grey eyes still amused. In the daytime her eyes were grey. It was only at night that they looked dark. The dimples quivered on her cheeks.

"What silly fools we were," she said casually, with an affectionate look at her husband.

"Yes, we were," I agreed.

"Not, not really, that's not fair. Just silly and childish."

"Yes."

The green signal light went on at the end of the platform. She walked back to her coach. They were waiting for her.

"Well, goodbye. No, not goodbye—so long. I'll write, I promise."

"Good."

I knew she wouldn't—what was the point? And she knew it as well as I did. She gave me a sidelong look and blushed a little.

"All the same, I'm glad you came. No flowers, of course. Do you know that you never gave me a single flower?"

"No, I never gave you anything."

She dropped my arm, took her husband's and they got in. The rest of us stood waiting. Her mother asked me something but I couldn't hear what she was saying. The engine gave a

long, low whistle. The train started. It's wonderful how smoothly an electric train starts! Everyone was smiling, waving caps, handkerchiefs, walking beside the train. There were accordions playing in two or three of the coaches, and people singing loudly in one. Students, probably. By now Lilya's coach was far away. She was holding on to her husband's shoulder with one hand and waving to us with the other.

Even at this distance, you could see how lovely were her hands. And how radiant her smile.

The train was out of sight. I lit a cigarette, stuffed my hands into my pockets and moved with the crowd towards the exit and the station square. Biting on my cigarette, I stared at the silver-painted lamp posts. They were so bright in the sun that I had to drop my eyes. I could admit it now: all that year I had lived in hope. Now it was over. Well, I was happy for her. Honestly, I was happy. Only for some reason my heart was aching very badly.

Girls were always getting married, and a very good thing too. What was bad was that I couldn't cry. I hadn't cried since I was fifteen. Now I was twenty. My heart was choking me, getting into my throat—soon I'd be chewing it, but still I couldn't cry. But it was a very good thing that girls should get married . . .

I went out into the square and looked at the station clock. It has squiggles instead of figures. I can never make them out. I went to the stand where they sold soft drinks and asked for a fruit juice, then I changed my mind and asked for plain water instead. It's difficult to drink fruit juice when your heart is in your throat.

I held the cold glass in my hands and took a mouthful but I couldn't swallow it.

In the end I managed to swallow and put the glass down. It seemed to do a little good.

I walked on to the underground. Something seemed to be wrong with my face—I noticed that people were looking at me. For a while after I got home I thought about Lilya. Then I stared at the wallpaper again. If you looked at it hard, you could see all sorts of curious things in it—jungles and elephants swinging their tails, or odd little people in cloaks and berets, or the faces of your friends—but not Lilya's.

Just about then her train must have been going through the station where we kissed for the first time. Only now it was summer. Would she look out of the window? Think of me?

But why should she look? She had her husband to look at. She loved him. And he was very handsome.

Nothing in this world goes on for ever, not even grief. Life never stops for one minute. It invades your soul and blows your sorrow away like smoke. Your sorrows are very small compared to the whole of life. The world is really very well arranged.

I'll soon be taking my degree. My boyhood is very far behind me, thank goodness. I'm a grown man, I can do as I like, no-one ruffles my hair as if I were a child. Soon I'll be leaving for the North. I feel very drawn to it, I don't quite know why. Probably because I had such a happy time there shooting, that summer. I have quite forgotten Lilya—it was all so long ago. Life would be very difficult if one never forgot anything. Naturally, she never wrote to me. I neither know nor care where she is now. I never think about her. I have an interesting life. It's true that I am neither a musician nor a poet. We can't all be poets. What with swimming, lectures, practical work, exams, I never have a free moment. I have also learned to dance, and I meet a lot of pretty and attractive girls and I fall in love with some of them, and they with me.

But I do sometimes dream of Lilya. I see her, hear her voice and her gentle laughter, I touch her hand, I talk to her, though I never remember afterwards what it was about. Sometimes she is sad and dejected, sometimes she is gay and her cheeks dimple—very faintly so that a stranger would never notice. I come to life again, I laugh, I feel young and shy as though I were seventeen and in love for the first time.

I wake up in the morning and go to lectures, or to a Union committee meeting or to speak at a meeting of the Komsomol, but all day I feel depressed and wish I could be alone for a bit and sit down and close my eyes.

This only happens very rarely—three or four times a year at the most. Besides, they are only dreams. Dreams, dreams ... Unasked for dreams!

I don't want them. What I like dreaming about is music. They say that if you lie on your right side you don't dream. From now on, I shall always sleep on my right side. I want to sleep soundly and to wake up cheerful in the morning. Life is so wonderful after all!

God, how I don't want those dreams!

English Translation © Harvill Press, London; Houghton Mifflin, New York, 1965

Translated from the Russian by Manya Harari and Andrew Thomson

Christmas Books

JOHN MOORE's new novel, *The Waters Under the Earth,* is the best thing he has ever done. It's a rich, beautifully-written saga of the family life of the Seldons. There have been Seldons at the Manor of Doddington since the 1580s, but now there is not much money and everything is changing bit by bit.

John Moore has always written with delight about the countryside, but never with deeper feeling than in this splendid leisurely, earthy book. (Collins, 25s.)

Alec Waugh always shows superb skill in creating a high-tensioned atmospheric novel. Usually they are set in exotic, exciting surroundings as well. In his latest novel, *The Mule on the Minaret,* Alec Waugh has not let his readers down. The setting is the Middle East during the war. A professor of history joins the Military Intelligence to get his share of some rather sordid spying and becomes involved with a passionate renegade girl who is the complete antithesis of the professor's cool-blooded wife. All this, plus closely-observed detail of people, customs and places, makes this another success for its author. (Cassell, 30s.)

All the excitement in the new Agatha Christie takes place *At Bertram's Hotel*—beautifully run, old-fashioned in the best possible way, and quietly expensive.

The last thing you would expect to find there is violence—let alone murder. But then, of course, Miss Jane Marple has arrived for a fortnight's holiday and it has always been her destiny to run into danger and mystery. You just can't go wrong if you buy this one! (Collins Crime Club, 16s.)

The Lonely Side Of The River, by Donald Mackenzie, concerns a seemingly fool-proof fraud to cheat an insurance company of a vast sum of money. This operation is the brainchild of a middle-aged solicitor. Needless to say, it doesn't work out the way it was meant to.

The solicitor becomes the victim of blackmail by one of his more shady clients. But this is just one of the many hazards he is up against before the macabre climax is reached. Strong stuff, this. (Hodder & Stoughton, 16s.)

If you like your non-fiction a bit off-beat, try *The Cock Lane Ghost*. It is about a curious episode of 18th century London history and the erudite author, Douglas Grant, M.A., D.Phil., Merton College, Oxford, has turned it into something as exciting as any thriller.

The ghost's "medium" was a child of twelve. Such worthies as Doctor Johnson and Horace Walpole became involved, and David Garrick had one of his greatest successes in a play about the Cock Lane Ghost. (Macmillan, 21s.)

A thriller, P. M. Hubbard's *The Holm Oaks*, is a grim, doom-laden affair with as nasty a murder scene as I have read anywhere.

Jake Haddon inherits a house he had never seen on a lonely stretch of coast, shielded from the worst of the weather by a gloomy copse of holm oaks. He and Elizabeth, his wife, although politely out of love with each other, decide to give it a try. He wants to because he cannot forget the wife of their only neighbour; Elizabeth because, as a fanatic bird-watcher, she suspects the presence of a night heron, a very rare bird, in the copse.

The plot grows murkier with the arrival of Stella, the sister-in-law, who is obsessively in love with Jake. Alas, no good comes of this at all.

Believe it or not, this is an extremely good book, and quite impossible to put down once started; but one hopes that the author will turn to something more pleasant with the next one he writes. (Michael Joseph, 18s.)

Where paperbacks are concerned, there are plenty to choose from. For instance, John Le Carré's *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold*, which J. B. Priestley described as having an atmosphere of chilly hell. It's about a rather seedy agent by the name of Leamus, and in the recently-made film version, Richard Burton plays the down-at-heel hero. (Pan, 5s.)

In *All But My Life*, Stirling Moss comes face to face with sports reporter Ken W. Purdy, resulting in a frank, no-holds-barred portrait of one of the greatest speed-merchants of our time. If you want to know what it feels like to spend most of your days among high-speed thrills, this is for you. (Pan, 2s. 6d.)

The Agony and the Ecstasy and *I, Michelangelo, Sculptor,* both by Irving Stone, go well together. The first is a fictional biography of this great artist and the second is a collection of his actual letters. (Fontana, 7s. 6d. and 6s. respectively.)

Horse Under Water, by Len Deighton, continues the adventures of that tough young operator recently brought to the screen by Michael Caine in the film of *The Ipcress File.* However, in *Horse Under Water* the assignment is to discover the secret of a German submarine wreck that has been submerged off the coast of Portugal since the war. (Penguin, 4s. 6d.)

With Christmas in mind, Penguin have brought out specially-boxed sets of books. *The Penguin Parkinson,* illustrated by Osbert Lancaster, covers Parkinson's Law, The Law and the Profits, In-Laws and Outlaws and costs 10s. 6d.

Then there is *A History of the Crusades,* Steven Runciman's great work in three volumes, at 42s.

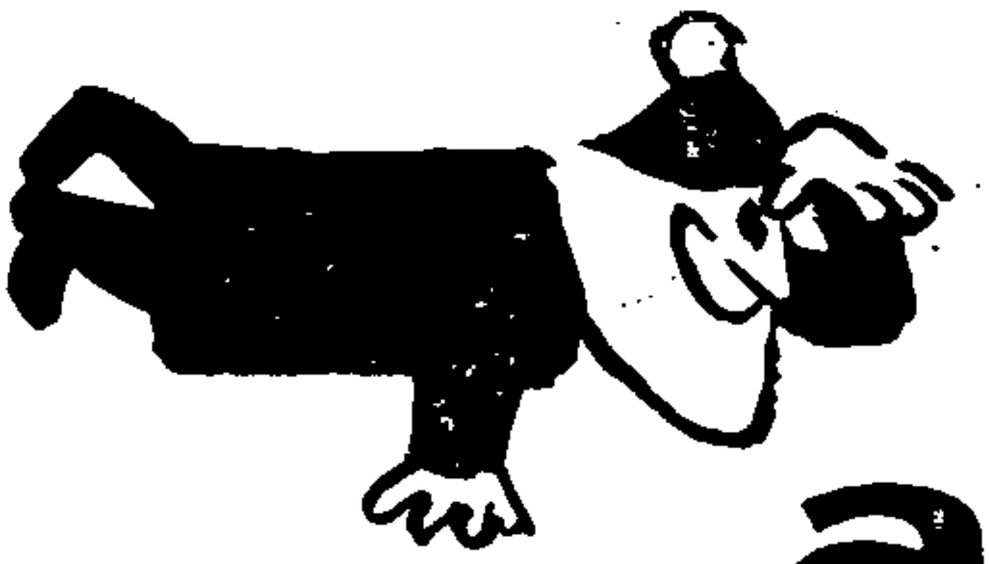
Lastly, *The Penguin Reference Desk Set,* which includes the new *Penguin English Dictionary,* fast becoming number one on the best-seller list. The complete set is 25s., but the dictionary on its own would make a good present for students who are nearly always hard-up, and is a bargain at 12s. 6d.

Elleston Trevor's *The Flight Of The Phœnix* is a powerful novel about twelve men and a monkey marooned in the Libyan Desert after their plane crashes. (Pan, 3s. 6d.)

Anyone interested in Egyptology will be delighted with *Tutankhamen,* by Christiane Desroches-Noblecourt. Beautifully illustrated with full-colour plates, it's a true account of the dramatic opening of this ancient King of Egypt's tomb and the amazing treasure found inside. (Penguin, 12s. 6d.)

Kilo Forty, by Miles Tripp, is a fierce suspense story of what would seem to be a quiet fishing holiday for four. A sequence of appalling events occurs that baffles in turn each of the characters and finally horrifies them—as long as they remain alive. (Pan, 3s. 6d.)

Jan Dehane



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ANSWERS TO CHRISTMAS PUZZLES

P. 58: 1 Pudding, 2 Carols, 3 Feast, 4 Decoration, 5 Parties, 6 Turkey, 7 Holly, 8 Cards, 9 Ribbon, 10 Snow, 11 Bells, 12 Crackers.

P. 59: 1 Death of Sir Winston Churchill on January 24, 2 Sea Bird II, 3 André Courrèges, 4 Post Office Tower, London, 5 None—Labour came to power in October 1964, 6 Ingrid Bergman, who opened in *A Month in the Country* at Guildford on June 2, 7 John Riding, 8 Albert Schweitzer, on September 6, 9 An Alsatian, Fenton of Kentwood, 10 None: the last four Royal babies were born in 1964, 11 His seventieth birthday, 12 Liverpool, 13 C. P. Snow—now Baron Snow of the City of Leicester, 14 A doctor's prescription for medicine, from February 1, 15 J. H. Edrich, with 2,319, 16 Stage of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, in the production of Schoenberg's *Moses and Aaron.*

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P. 61: Burglar's jacket shorter; extra glass ball on left of tree; woman's shoe near box has longer toe; extra butterfly wing shows on left arm of woman's dressing-gown; left-hand side of dressing-gown bow is smaller; top of woman's head is rounder; one glass ball missing behind lid of box.

P. 62: Sir Compton Mackenzie.

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Their testimony was reinforced by the editress of a great national periodical who spoke of the need for competent instruction in the writing of features intended for publication.

Further tributes to the LSJ were broadcast last year on January 28th, March 1st and October 20th.

A warning was given about the doubtful value of the claims made by certain schools. If you seek our advice, you will not be lured by lavish promises or bombarded with letters urging enrolment upon you. If you decide to become a member, you will work under a personal coach and your work will be fully criticised and returned promptly . . . no waiting for weeks or even months.

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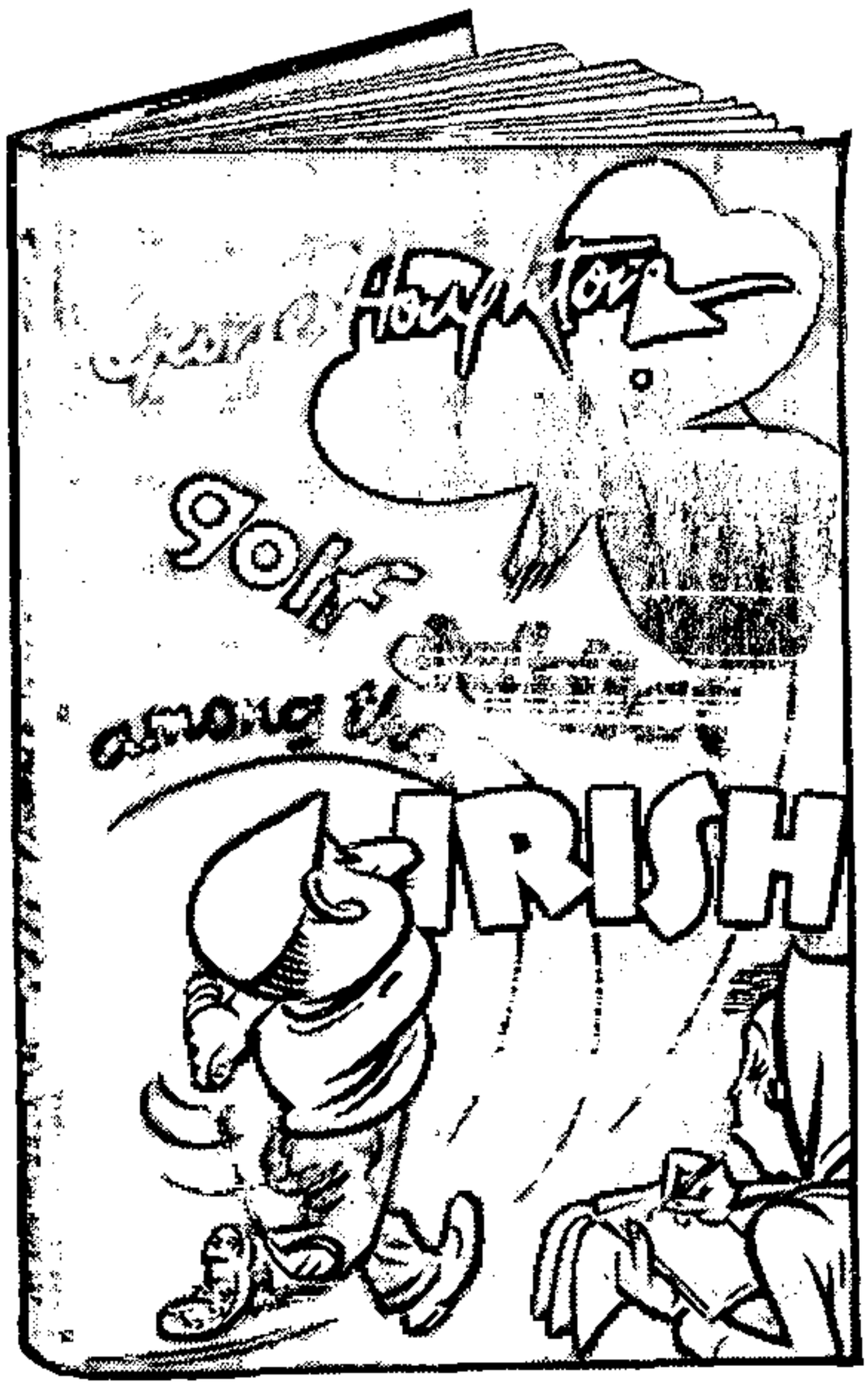

by George Houghton

Every golf addict, says the author, holds a passport to a warm welcome in Ireland and he goes on to describe how golf in Ireland is different from golf in any other part of the world. During his 'Irish golfing safari', George Houghton and the 'Golf Widow' travelled two thousand miles and visited twenty-three golf clubs, including Royal Dublin, Portmarnock, Royal Portrush, Killarney, Lahinch and Ballybunion. He met and talked with all kinds of golfers, from heroes like Joe Carr, Jimmy Bruen, Christy O'Connor and Harry Bradshaw to many more humble, but no less enthusiastic, performers, who made his tour so delightful.

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